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THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH

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THE CAPTIVITY

OF

JUDAH.

ESTHER, v. 2.

'And the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand.'—P. 212. (*Frontispiece.*)

TIVITY

DAH.

BY THE

THE PEEP OF DAY, &c.

LONDON:
RDS, PICCADILLY.
1876.

THE CAPTIVITY

OF

JUDAH.

BY THE

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FAREWELL

TO MY LITTLE READERS.

PERHAPS you have read nine of my little books on Scripture. This is the saddest book of all, for it tells you how the Jews were taken captive for their sins, but we hope the time is near when they will be restored by Jesus to their own land.

I can write no more books, for I am weak and worn out and ready to die,

but Jesus, about whom I have told you in your baby days, will never die again. Serve Him all your days, and be glad when He comes in glory.

Pray for me that I, with you, may be caught up.

Your loving Grandmama in Christ,

FAVELL LEE MORTIMER.

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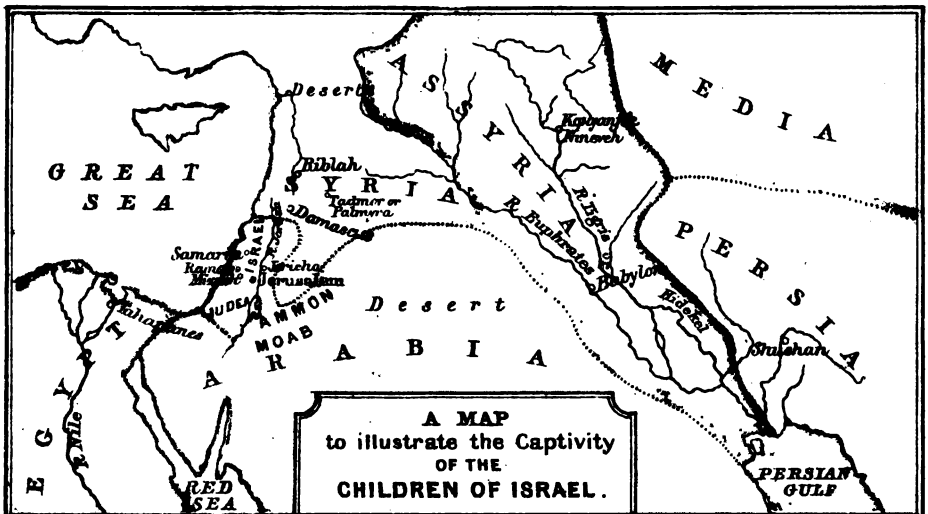

J. Jobbins lith.

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PART FIRST.

THE PEOPLE LEFT IN THE LAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE WONDER THAT ALL BEHELD.

'The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed, that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem.'—Lam. iv. 12.

DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

2 Kings, xxv.; Jer. lii.

A MONTH after King Zedekiah had been taken captive—the city was destroyed.

King Nebuchadnezzar did not go to Jerusalem himself; he remained at Riblah, a hundred miles from Jerusalem, and he sent his great captain Nebuzar-adan to Jerusalem to finish the work of destruction.

This great captain found a great many people hidden in Jerusalem. One of these was Seraiah, the High Priest;* he did not kill him, but he had him seized and kept to go back with him to Riblah. There were other priests and chief men who were taken captive at the same time.

What a sight they beheld before they set out on their journey! They beheld Jerusalem in flames. The palace, the great houses, were all burned to the ground. But the worst sight

* He was the ancestor of Ezra the Scribe Ezra, vii. 1.

was the TEMPLE in flames. This was a just punishment for Manasseh having set up an idol in God's holy house. A long, long while before,* Solomon had built that glorious place, and now it was a heap of ruins. And so was all Jerusalem—a heap of ruins. The walls were thrown down, the buildings were burned.

And now it was time for the captain to return to his master at Riblah.

What an immense quantity of things he took with him! All the grand furniture, that had not been carried away with Jehoiachin, was now taken to Riblah. This furniture consisted chiefly of things made of brass. There was an immense bath of brass which stood upon the backs of twelve brass oxen; it was called 'the sea,' and it

* 860 years.

used to be kept filled with water for the use of the Temple. That was taken by the captain to his master. Many living oxen or camels must have been used to draw those brass oxen across the land. There were, also, two very tall brass pillars that used to stand in front of the Temple. They were taken, as well as all the spoons, and dishes, and bowls, and snuffers, and shovels, and pans, whether of gold, silver, or brass. If there had been a priest, there was nothing for him to offer sacrifices with — left in Jerusalem. But the priests were taken away also. How mournful it must have been to see the train of waggons going along, and the captives going with them.

Nebuchadnezzar was waiting at Riblah to receive the spoil. The great men were brought before him to be

2 KINGS, XXV. 11.
Nebuzar-adan carried the fugitives to Babylon.'
P. 5.

judged. They were all condemned to die, and they were all slain at Riblah —nearly a hundred chief men. Many poor people were among the captives; they were not condemned to death, but they were taken as prisoners to Babylon. Thus the Lord fulfilled His word which He had spoken to Moses about Israel more than a thousand years ago:—'The Lord shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation neither thou nor thy fathers have known.' Deut. xxviii. 36.

How dreadful are the consequences of disobedience! To punish disobedience angels were cast out of heaven, Adam and Eve out of paradise, and the Children of Israel out of the Land of Promise.

CHAPTER II.

GOD'S PROMISE TO JEREMIAH.

'I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.'—Jer. xv. 21.

WHAT BECAME OF JEREMIAH.

Jer. xxxix. 11–13; xl. 1–6.

WHEN the city was taken Jeremiah was in the court of the king's palace, a prisoner. He was taken away with many other captives, just about twenty miles off, to a place called Ramah. Chains were on his hands, and he was a prisoner of the king of Babylon instead of being a prisoner of the king of Jerusalem.

But Nebuchadnezzar had heard of Jeremiah, and how he had advised

the Jews to submit to him, so he wished to be kind to him, and said to his captain, Nebuzar-adan, 'Take care of him, and do him no harm; but do to him whatever he wishes.' So this captain looked among the prisoners for Jeremiah, and when he found him he spoke to him in a very godly manner. He said, 'The Lord thy God declared that this evil would come upon this place. Now the Lord has brought it, as He said, because ye have sinned against the Lord and have not obeyed His voice.' Was it not surprising that a heathen should speak in this manner? But perhaps some of the Jews in Babylon had told the captain about God.

Then the captain took the chains off Jeremiah's hands, and gave him his choice, either to come with him to Ba-

bylon or to stay in his own land; and he promised, if Jeremiah would come to Babylon, to take great care of him.

Which did Jeremiah choose? To go with the captain or to stay with the poor people?

He chose to stay with his own poor people. This was a good choice to make. It was like the choice that Moses once made when he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin.

If Jeremiah had gone to Babylon, he would have had many fine things: he might have become a great lord.

But we ought always to avoid temptation. It is far better to live on poor fare in a land where God is known than to live in grandeur among the wicked.

The captain told Jeremiah that the

King of Babylon had appointed a good man to be governor of the land. Jeremiah knew the man well: his name was Gedaliah. He was the son of Ahikam, a great friend of Jeremiah's, who had once prevented the people from killing him.* And he was the grandson of Shaphan, the man who read God's book to King Josiah.

This good Gedaliah was the chief man left in the land. He did not live among the heaps of ruins in Jerusalem; but he lived in a town called Mizpah, about six miles off. He could clearly see the ruins of Jerusalem from the hill of Mizpah.

Jeremiah determined to take the

* Jer. xxvi. 24: 'The hand of Ahikam was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.'

captain's advice and to go to Mizpah. Before he parted from the captain, he received a present from him as a mark of gratitude (I know not what it was —whether money, or clothes, or what). He also received some food, perhaps flour or fruit:—I know not.

So Jeremiah arrived at Mizpah, and took up his abode among the poor labourers there. It was a better abode than the court of the prison, for now he had sweet air to breathe, and his liberty; and more food than during that fearful siege of Jerusalem.

Whilst he was at Mizpah he could go to Jerusalem and look at the ruins. Then it was he wrote that sorrowful book called the Lamentations. He saw the foxes walking upon Mount Zion, and he cried, 'Woe unto us, that we have sinned.'

JEREMIAH, xl. 5.

'So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go.'—P. 10.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOUNTY OF THE LORD.

'The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.'—Ps. cxlv. 15, 16.

JEREMIAH IN PEACE AT MIZPAH.

Jer. xl. 7–12.

At first there were only a few people at Mizpah, but soon a great many came from all parts of the land, and even from other lands. Gedaliah gave them good advice, saying, 'Serve the King of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.' He did not wish so many people to stay with him: he had not food enough for them. So he told them to go and gather fruit, and to settle in different cities.

The people took Gedaliah's advice and went about the land with baskets in their hands, gathering fruit, and carrying jars to hold the oil they might press from the olives. The harvest of barley and wheat was over; but the fruits had not been gathered. It was a happy thing that Jerusalem was destroyed in summer, not in winter, or I do not know what would have become of all the people in the land. They must have died of hunger —but now they had plenty to eat. The whole land was full of orchards and vineyards. The owners were gone into captivity to Babylon, and any one might go into these gardens and pick their fruits, and press oil from the olives and wine from the grapes.

It must have been beautiful to see the poor people with their baskets

filled with fruit! How joyful the children must have been to see the great bunches of grapes! How gladly they must have helped their parents to gather the pomegranates and the dates, and the olives, and the figs, and the mulberries, and the apples, and the melons! What a change for those who had been shut up in Jerusalem, and who had almost perished with hunger!

Kind Jeremiah must have been glad to see them so happy. It must have made him wipe away his tears for a little while.

CHAPTER IV.

WISDOM OF TAKING WARNING.

'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.'—Prov. xxii. 3.

THE ALARM.

Jer. xl. 13 to end.

THIS peaceful scene was soon disturbed. One day a number of men were seen returning from the fields. They were the captains, who had been gathering fruit. They said, 'We want to speak to Gedaliah, the Governor.' So they all saw him, and spoke to him.

They had something dreadful to tell him.

'Do you know,' they said, 'that a man is going to murder you?'

'Who?'

'One of the captains who came to you the other day. He is not here now, but he is coming soon to KILL you?'

'What is his name?'

'Ishmael.'

'I can't believe it,' said Gedaliah. 'O no! Ishmael would not do such a thing. I am sure he would not. You are all of you mistaken.'

So the captains saw it was no use trying to make Gedaliah believe what they said.

But one of them named Johanan determined to try again.

He said he wanted to see Gedaliah *quite alone.*

Johanan said, 'I can prevent Ishmael killing you. There is only one way. I will go and kill *him.* Only do

allow me to go. I will keep it quite a secret; no one shall know that you allowed me.'

'O no!' said Gedaliah. 'You must not kill him.'

'*Then* if I do not,' said Johanan, 'I will tell you what will happen, he will kill both *you* and all of us, and the few people left in the land will perish.'

'No,' said Gedaliah; 'Ishmael is not a bad man, and he will not do these wicked things. You speak falsely of him.'

So Johanan saw it was of no use trying to persuade Gedaliah.

But was it right of Gedaliah to refuse to believe?

No; it was foolish and obstinate.

Why did he not ask Jeremiah for advice?

It would have been wrong to do as Johanan advised, and to kill Ishmael; but Jeremiah would have found out the truth by praying to God, and would have told Gedaliah what was right to do.

CHAPTER V.

MURDEROUS HANDS.

'Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity.'—Isa. lix. 3.

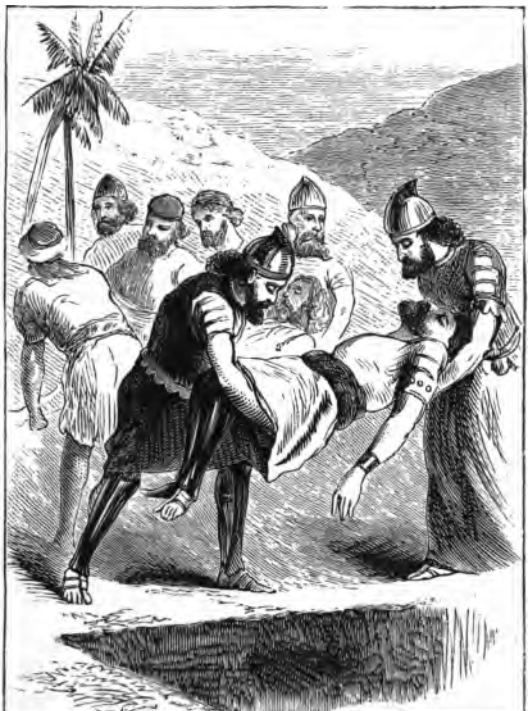
THE MURDERER.

Jer. xli. 1–3.

THE summer was now over, and autumn was come.

One day Gedaliah saw Ishmael enter the town, accompanied by ten men. Ishmael was a very great lord, for he was a cousin of the king's; his friends too were great lords. Most of the king's relations had been taken to Babylon, but these few had remained in the land.

Gedaliah invited them all to dine with him. He remembered what



JEREMIAH, xli. 7.
'Ishmael slew them, and cast them into the midst of the pit.'
P. 19.

Johanan had said lately of Ishmael, but he did not believe him. He thought he and the other ten appeared kind and friendly, and he was not afraid of their hurting him.

But in the midst of the feast, all the eleven started up, drew their swords from under their robes, killed Gedaliah and his servants, rushed out of the parlour into the streets, killed all the Jews they met, and even some of the King of Babylon's soldiers, who happened to be there. Those streets must have run down with blood.

However Ishmael did not kill the women and children, but he kept them as his captives.

All the dead bodies he threw into a great hole, which he found in the town. It had been made three hundred years before, by King Asa, that

good king of Judah, when he wanted to hide his people from Baasha, a wicked king of Israel. (1 Kings, xv. 16–22.)

Did Ishmael think that he could hide those dead bodies from the eye of God?

God saw Abel's blood which Cain had spilt, and he saw those dead bodies in the deep pit.

Why did Ishmael commit this horrible murder?

Had Gedaliah done him any harm? No; but was not Ishmael envious? Did he not think, Why did not Nebuchadnezzar make me governor, I, who am a relation of the king's?

Pride leads to envy, and envy leads to murder. Let us hate a proud thought, for it makes us like the devil.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRAYER OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN TROUBLE.

'Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men.'—Ps. xxvi. 9.

MORE MURDERS.

Jer. xli. 4–10.

THE day after the murder must have been a dreadful day for Ishmael and his ten friends, and it must have been dreadful for Jeremiah to feel he was amidst such wicked men.

The blood was scarcely washed off their hands, or their swords, when lo! eighty men are going along the road. They do not carry swords in their hands, but incense and fruits. Instead of wearing armour, they have

torn their clothes, and shorn their beards. They seem quiet and sorrowful men. There is blood upon their clothes, but it is their own blood, for they have foolishly cut themselves, to show their sorrow.

Why are they so sorrowful? They are mourning for the afflictions of their country, and they are bringing offerings to the house of the Lord; for Mizpah was very near Jerusalem.

There was now no temple at Jerusalem where men could go up and worship, but the heaps of the Temple stones were dear to the poor Jews, and some worshipped near the ruins. Ishmael thought, 'I and my ten companions will easily be able to kill those eighty sorrowful men, if we can get them into the city of Mizpah. He did not wish them to go into Jerusalem,

lest the King of Babylon should by some means hear of his murders, and send to punish him.

So he went towards them, weeping as he went along, and when he met them, he said, 'Do come to Gedaliah in Mizpah.'

They did not know that Gedaliah was dead, and they thought Ishmael was their friend, and would lead them to a place of worship at Mizpah. But when they had got into the midst of the city, Ishmael with his ten men rushed upon them and killed them. Ishmael would have killed them *all;* only ten of the eighty men cried out,—

'Don't kill us; for we can show holes in the field where we have hidden corn, and oil, and honey.'

So Ishmael spared those ten just men

couraged him to commit murder, would now shelter him in his crimes, and receive the wretched troop. How would Jeremiah feel amongst those wicked people? How much the good people amongst them must have longed for a deliverer!

God was ready to 'hear the prayers of His people and to send deliverance.

CHAPTER VII.

REST AND PEACE.

'They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord, but they that deal truly are his delight.'—Prov. xi. 20.

THE REMNANT AT BETHLEHEM.

Jer. xli. 11 to end.

As the miserable remnant were on the way to the land of Ammon, they were weary, and they rested beside some refreshing streams near Gibeon. Suddenly they beheld an army approaching! Who was at the head of it?

Not an enemy, but a friend. It was Johanan, one of the captains that had once gathered fruits when Gedaliah had charge of the remnant. How glad they were to see him! He was come to deliver them. He had heard

of Ishmael's wickedness, and he was come to take vengeance.

But there was one person who was not glad, but horribly frightened. That person was Ishmael. He remembered Johanan too well. As soon as he saw him he fled away as fast as he could. And he knew where to go. To the wicked King of Ammon. But did any one follow this murderer? Yes; those who had joined in his crimes. Those *ten!* But not all of them—only eight. Perhaps two had been cut off, for there were only eight left to follow their bloody leader to the land of Ammon.

Thus were the poor captives delivered. They did not go one step further, but gave themselves up to Johanan. How glad he was to take charge of the poor frightened women

and children; for Ishmael had made them all his slaves. There were some brave soldiers amongst the captives, whom Johanan took under his care. But where was Johanan to take them? He was afraid to carry them back to Mizpah, lest the King of Babylon should hear of the murders and think that Johanan had any share in them.

He took them to Bethlehem, to those pleasant fields where David once fed sheep, to a place which David had once given to the son of his old friend Barzillai. (2 Sam. xix. 37.)

What a wonderful escape these people had from the cruel Ishmael, and what a blessed change they now enjoyed in that town of rest and peace, even Bethlehem.

Jeremiah had shared in their sufferings, and now he shared in their joys.

CHAPTER VIII.

HYPOCRISY DETECTED.

'For ye dissembled in your hearts when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us unto the Lord our God.'—Jer. xlii. 20.

JEREMIAH IN BETHLEHEM.

Jer. xlii.

JOHANAN and his people treated Jeremiah with great respect. They were in trouble at present. One of their troubles was the loss of their friends who had been murdered, another was fear of the King of Babylon, and another was *hunger*. For now that the summer was over, and they were moving to and fro, they had but little food.

In their trouble they came to Jeremiah and said, 'Do tell us what we

ought to do—whether to stay in this land or to go down into Egypt. Do pray for us to the Lord. Indeed we will do whatever the Lord says.'

These people appeared very humble; but in their hearts they were proud and deceitful.

Jeremiah was pleased with the people for speaking so humbly, and he went and prayed to the Lord for them. He went on praying for ten days before he got an answer, and then the Lord said, 'Tell the people that if they stay in this land I will bless them; and I will save them from the King of Babylon, and not let him hurt them. But tell the people if they go into Egypt they shall die, either by the sword, by famine, or by pestilence.'

Jeremiah delivered this message to the people. He finished his message

by telling them that the Lord had found out their sly and deceitful behaviour. The Lord had told Jeremiah that they did not really wish to do what was right, but only what pleased themselves.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLANS OF THE FOOL.

'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.'—Prov. xii. 15.

JEREMIAH TAKEN INTO EGYPT.

Jer. xliii. 1-7.

How did the people behave when they heard Jeremiah's advice?

A great number of them came up to him, with Johanan at their head, and other proud men, and said to him, 'Thou speakest falsely: God has not forbidden us to go into Egypt; but it is Baruch who sets you against us, because he wants us to be killed by the men of Babylon.'

What a wicked speech this was!

Who would have thought that Johanan would have spoken thus? He seemed to be a good man; but you remember how he once proposed to kill Ishmael secretly. Now the wickedness of his heart came out. How could he speak ill of Baruch, the good prophet?

Jeremiah could not prevent the proud men going into Egypt. They went and took him with them, and they took Baruch also; and they took the two young princesses, and a great many women and children.

They had to cross the wilderness; but they got through it safely, though it is a place full of 'deserts and pits, a land of drought, and of the shadow of death.' (Jer. ii. 6.)

They arrived in Egypt; they saw the great river Nile; they went to the city of the great King Pharaoh. That

city was named Tahpanhes, or sometimes it was called by the beautiful name of Daphne.

It was built on the river, and was well fortified with towers.

In this great city the people of Judah thought they should be safe.

CHAPTER X.

THE LORD'S SERVANTS KNOW HIS SECRETS.

'Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets.'—Amos, iii. 7.

JEREMIAH HIDING THE STONES.

Jer. xliii. 8 to end.

VERY soon Jeremiah was seen with great stones in his hand, taking them towards a brick-kiln near the gates of the palace-garden. In that brick-kiln Jeremiah hid the great stones.

People wondered why he did so.

Jeremiah soon told them the reason.

It was God who had told him to hide the stones, in order to make the people observe him and listen to him.

JEREMIAH, xliii. 9.

'Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brickkiln.'—P. 36.

'On the very spot,' he said, 'where I have hid these stones, THERE shall Nebuchadnezzar set his throne and spread out all his splendid ornaments; for he is coming to conquer Egypt, and to destroy the idols.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE END WILL SHOW WHOSE WORDS COME TRUE.

'Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant . . . shall know whose words shall stand, MINE or THEIRS.' —Jer. xliv. 28.

BAKING IN THE STREETS.

Jer. xliv.

BUT all Jeremiah said was of no use in turning the people to God. They began to burn incense to the moon in the streets, just as they used to do in their own land. The children gathered sticks, the fathers lighted the fire, and the women made cakes or buns, in honour of the queen of hea-

ven; that was the name they gave to the moon. See Jer. vii. 18.

Jeremiah came to them and said, 'Why do you go on just as you used to do in your own land? Has not God punished you for your sins once? And will He not go on punishing you? Yes, He will; you shall not go back to your own land, but you shall *all* perish in Egypt (except a very few who shall escape).'

Then the women, as well as their husbands, stood boldly up, and said, 'We will do as we please. We were much better off when we worshipped the queen of heaven than we are now. We had plenty of food then; so we will do the same again.'

Then Jeremiah told the people that they would come to a miserable end. As for King Pharaoh, in whom they

trusted, God would deliver him up to his enemies.

And it all happened as Jeremiah said.

The King of Babylon did come and destroy the cities of Egypt. King Pharaoh was seized by some of his own rebellious people, and was strangled in his own palace; and the Jews were miserably destroyed, except a very few who escaped to their own land.

Thus the words were fulfilled that Jeremiah had once spoken about the figs, a long while before.

He had said that the people that were taken to Babylon were like good figs, because they would repent, but that the people who would go to Egypt were like bad figs, for they would not repent. See Jer. xxiv.

I wish we knew what became of Jeremiah. We know he was not murdered; for God said to him at the first when he was a child, 'I am with thee to deliver thee.' chap. i. 8.

Baruch also, we know, was not murdered, for God had made him the same promise: 'Behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.' xlv. 5.

It may be that Jeremiah and Baruch returned into their own land and died there.

Jeremiah had led a mournful life, and he was now come to the end of his days. The best part of his life was when good King Josiah reigned; then Jeremiah was a little boy, and soon became a prophet. After Josiah was dead, he never saw another good

king, but only bad ones that were taken into captivity. Jehoahaz was taken into Egypt; Jehoiakim died on his way to Babylon, and the other two, Jeconiah and Zedekiah, were taken captives to Babylon.

All this Jeremiah had prophesied with many tears; for he was like the Lord Jesus Christ, in weeping over Jerusalem. He cried out:—

'Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!' ix. 1.

PART SECOND.

THE PEOPLE TAKEN TO BABYLON.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DIVINE BLESSING.

'For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.'—Eccl. ii. 26.

THE FIRST CAPTIVES.

Dan. i.

LET us turn from Egypt, where the Jews perished, to Babylon, where they lived in captivity. They were the good figs, of whom God said: 'I

will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord : and they shall be my people, and I will be their God : for they shall return unto me with their whole heart.' (Jer. xxiv. 7.)

Twenty years before those Jews went down into Egypt, some young Jews had been taken captive into Babylon. They were youths of the royal family— they were the great-grandchildren of that good King Hezekiah.

God had been displeased with Hezekiah, for showing the messengers from Babylon his fair palace, and He had sent Isaiah to tell Hezekiah, that as a punishment, some of his great-grandchildren should be taken to Babylon as captives, as well as his treasures.

Then said Isaiah to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord of Hosts: Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of *thy sons*, shall they take away; and they shall be in the palace of the King of Babylon.' (Isa. xxxix. 5, 6.)

A hundred years passed away, and then this threatening was fulfilled.

Nebuchadnezzar came and took away the treasures of the palace, and among them many young noblemen, and some of the king's own family.

The magnificent golden vessels were placed in the temple of Bel, the god of Babylon, and the young men were brought to the king's court.

All these young men were handsome and clever. A great lord named Ashpenaz had chosen them by the king's order.

There were four princes much above any of the rest, both in beauty and cleverness. It will be seen that they were also superior in goodness.

Their names were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These names all signified something about God.

Daniel signified, 'God is my judge;' Hananiah, 'the Lord has been gracious to me;' Mishael, 'he who comes from God;' Azariah, 'the Lord is my helper.'

But the youths were not allowed to keep these holy names. The heathen prince Ashpenaz gave them new names which signified something about idols. Daniel was called Belteshazzar; Han-

aniah was called Shadrach; Mishael was called Meshach; Azariah was called Abed-nego.

How much they must have hated these heathen names! They knew the meanings of them, for they were taught the language of Babylon. Daniel knew that his name was about the idol Bel or Baal, whom he abhorred. The other names were just as bad, Abed means a servant, and Nego is the name of an idol. So Abed-nego signified the servant of Nego.

These youths could not help being called by their bad names, and therefore it was no sin in them.

There was one thing that was a grief to Daniel.

Every day there was brought to him and his friends a delicious dinner from the king's table, with ex-

cellent wine: such as the king himself drank.

Was this a grief to them? Yes; for there were many things eaten by Gentiles which were forbidden to Jews, and also food was often brought to idols to be blessed. Daniel therefore felt that the food was unholy; and so it was for a Jew in those days.

We count no food unholy, because the angel said to Peter, 'What God has cleansed, *that* call not thou common.' (Acts, x. 15.) But it was different in the old Jewish days.

It was very right of Daniel to be grieved about the unholy food.

Many would have said, 'There can be no harm, for I can't help eating it.' But Daniel determined to try to help it.

So he asked Ashpenaz, the prince, to excuse his eating the king's food.

Was Ashpenaz angry at this excellent food being despised? No; he was not: for God had made him love Daniel very much indeed. The prince only said, 'I am afraid the king will be very angry, for he desired that you should have that food and drink. If you do not eat that good food, I am afraid that you and your friends will not look as well as the other youths.'

Then Daniel went to the head-servant of the house, named Melzar, and asked him to give him common food, and to see how he looked, after a while. So Melzar went and brought common food called pulse. It was

dry stuff, such as grains of wheat, barley, and rye. Instead of wine the youths drank water only.

At the end of ten days Melzar saw that those four looked better than the other young men; they were both fairer and fatter. Then Melzar was allowed to give them nothing but pulse and water.

You see these were not greedy youths; they did not delight in eating, but were able to deny themselves to do what was right.

They went on learning the language of Babylon, and all kinds of sciences. They studied diligently, and the Lord made them able to understand and to remember.

There was one thing that Daniel knew, which no man could have taught

DANIEL, i. 15.
'And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter.'—P. 50.

him. It was to understand dreams and visions. He was a prophet. The Lord called him in his youth, as he did Samuel and Jeremiah, to be a prophet. And what a great prophet he was! Except Moses, we do not read of any one so great.

When these years had passed away, all the young Jews were brought in to the king, to be seen by him, and talked to by him. Of these youths, four were to be chosen as attendants on the king. They were to be his courtiers, and his counsellors, and his servants. This was counted a great honour. But it was dangerous to be near the king, for he was often very furious. It was like living with a lion to live with him.

However, he was very fond of talk-

ing to these four youths, and he found that they knew a great deal more than any of the wise men of Babylon, for there were many men in Babylon who pretended to be very wise.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE UNFATHOMABLE WISDOM OF GOD.

'He revealeth the deep and secret things; He knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with Him.'—Dan. ii. 22.

THE KING'S DREAM.

Dan. ii. 1-30.

ONE day the king woke up in a very troubled state of mind. He said he had had a wonderful dream, and that he could not sleep. He desired all the wise men of Babylon to come to him: so they came. But Daniel did not come, for he was not sent for, and he knew nothing about the dream.

The king said to his wise men, 'I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.'

The Chaldeans (for so the wise men were called) replied, 'O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will then give the interpretation.'

But the king could not remember his dream: he wanted these men to tell him what it was. That they could not do, for the king would know whether they told him what he had *really* dreamed.

Then the king said, 'If you don't tell my dream, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses made a dung-hill. If you do tell me, you shall have rewards and great honour.'

O how the men wished they could tell the dream, but they could not.

'There is not a man upon earth,' they said, 'who can tell the dream; therefore no other king ever asked such a thing.'

This answer made the king furious. He immediately commanded that all the wise men should be destroyed. Why did he not send for Daniel? There was *one* now upon earth who would tell the dream: yet no one spoke of Daniel, though many people knew he was wise. Perhaps they were envious of him, and did not wish him to be consulted.

But when the commandment was given to kill the wise men, the king's men came to look for Daniel and his friends. Was not this unfair? Though he had never been called, yet to kill him?

Daniel was quite surprised when men came with an order to kill him. He said, 'Why are we to be killed?'

'For not telling the dream,' replied Arioch the captain.

'What dream?' Arioch told him all about it. Daniel did not stop long talking to him; he saw there was no time to lose: he went to the palace and asked to see the king. He was a great favourite, and his request was granted. He said to the king, 'Only give me time, and I will tell you the dream as well as the meaning.'

Daniel did not know the dream: but he knew that his God did, and that his God could tell him.

Nebuchadnezzar promised to wait till the next day.

Meanwhile, nobody was to be killed. But the next day they would be killed if the dream was not made known.

As soon as Daniel got back to his house, he called his three friends and asked them to pray that God

would tell him the dream. So they all prayed.

Night came.

What a night! How many wise men feared it would be their last night.

In the night God spoke to Daniel and told him the dream.

How thankful Daniel was for this mercy! He began immediately to bless God, saying, 'I thank Thee, and praise Thee, O thou God of my fathers.'

After offering up a prayer, he went to Arioch the captain, and said, 'Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will explain the dream.' It was very generous of Daniel to entreat that the wise men should be spared.

Arioch did not know that Daniel had been in to the king the day before, so he was in a great hurry to

bring him in, and he spoke of him as if Daniel had been a stranger, and said to the king, 'I have found a man of the captives of Judah that will explain the dream.'

He said *he* had found him: though it was not *he* who had found him.

It was a grand scene when Daniel came in before the king to explain the dream. Many were waiting to hear what he said, and wondering whether he would be able to tell the forgotten vision. Daniel thought this a good opportunity for speaking of his God before the great men of Babylon. He praised Him, saying, 'There is a God in heaven who revealeth secrets.' He took no glory to himself, but said, 'This secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living.'

Then he began to relate the forgotten dream. Think how anxiously Nebuchadnezzar waited for his first words.

What were they?

CHAPTER XIV.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever.'—Rev. xi. 15.

THE INTERPRETATION.

Dan. ii. 31.

'THOU, O king, sawest, and behold a *great image.*'

Yes, the dream was about an image—such an image—so great, and so bright, and so terrible!

What was this image made of?

Not all of the same material: the head was made of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the body and sides of brass, the legs of iron, with feet part of iron and part of clay.

How strange that an image with a head of gold should have feet of iron and clay.

While the king in his dream was looking at the image, he saw a stone cut out (not by the hands of man); and he saw the stone knock down the image by falling against its feet, and then he saw the stone break the whole image in pieces: the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold; and he saw the wind carry away all the broken bits, as if they had been as light as chaff. And then he saw the stone grow into a great mountain which filled the earth.

The king knew that this was the dream he had dreamed. No wonder he wanted to know the meaning of it. He was quite sure that Daniel could

tell the true meaning, because he had found out the dream itself.

And what was the meaning of the dream?

Daniel said to the king, 'Thou art the head of gold.'

How pleased the king must have been to hear this! But what was the silver part of the image?

This was the kingdom that should come after Babylon. It was the kingdom that would destroy Babylon.

These two silver arms were Cyrus, king of Persia, and Darius, king of Media. A great deal will be said about that Cyrus who would soon conquer Babylon and set up the kingdom of Persia. That was the king who would let the Jews return to their own land. Isaiah the prophet had

spoken of him a long while before, and had called him by his name Cyrus. (See Isa. xlv. 1.) Daniel would live to see that silver king.

But who was the brass body and sides?

Nothing is said in the Bible about that brass kingdom; yet most children have heard of Alexander the Great; he was king of Greece and head of the brass kingdom.

After the brass body came the iron legs.

That iron kingdom is Rome, and the kings of Rome were called Cæsars.

When Jesus was born, one of these Cæsars ruled over all lands, even the land of Israel, as you will see in Luke, ii. 'It came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from *Cæsar* Augustus, that all the world should

be taxed (that is, enrolled, or have their names written down). And Joseph went up with Mary his espoused wife. And she brought forth her first-born son.' When the Jews wanted to crucify Jesus, they cried out, 'We have no king but Cæsar.'

This iron kingdom of Rome has come to an end.

What is the great kingdom now?

There is no very great kingdom; no kingdom much greater than all others. The kingdoms now are weak like clay, though mixed with iron.

At last there will be ten little kingdoms. Suddenly a little stone will be sent by God. Who is that little stone? Jesus! He will come again and destroy all the kingdoms, and then He will, like a great mountain, fill the earth, and make it holy and happy.

Daniel, ii. 46.
'Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel.'—P. 65.

We have a description of this little stone in Rev. xix. 11. Jesus comes riding on a white horse to make *war*. His eyes are as a flame of fire, and on His head are many crowns. Out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron. O yes, He shall break them in pieces as easily as an iron bar breaks in pieces earthen cups. And when the wicked are destroyed, Jesus will fill the earth with glory.

Such was the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

When the king had heard Daniel explain it, he fell on his face and worshipped the prophet. Was not that wonderful? Daniel did not like to be worshipped, but he could not prevent the king desiring them to burn in-

cense before him, as if he were a god. But Daniel was glad when the king praised his God.

This is what the king said, 'Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and one who can reveal secrets.'

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and made him governor over one part of his kingdom, and set him over all those who could not like him tell the dream. Those men ought to have loved Daniel, for he had saved their lives; but they did not, for wicked people do not love the righteous.

There was one favour which Daniel asked the king to grant him. It was not for *himself*, but for his three friends. It was that they might be made governors; and the king did

what Daniel asked. Daniel himself, he was with the king as his chief friend—just as Joseph once was with Pharaoh.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WONDERFUL SIGHT IN THE FIRE.

'Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.'—Dan iii. 25.

THE FURNACE.

Dan. iii.

THIS chapter is too plain to require any explanation. The story is most interesting. It seems that the king had grown prouder than ever since his dream. He had heard Daniel say, 'Thou art the head of gold.' It came into his head to make an image of gold. No doubt it was made in the honour of King Nebuchadnezzar. It was about a hundred feet high, but it

was not broad—only about ten feet broad. Probably the image was set upon a high pillar, where everybody could see it. Daniel was not made to come to worship this image, but his three friends were forced to come. They were called, not (as Daniel was) by their Jewish names, but by their idolatrous names. And they will be for ever famous as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, because they walked with Jesus in the fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON PRIDE.

'Yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God.'—Ezek. xxviii. 2.

THE KING'S SECOND DREAM.

Dan. iv. 1-28.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR wrote a letter.—To whom?

To 'ALL PEOPLE.'

He was king over ALL people, and he wrote to them ALL.

Do you think it was a wicked letter he wrote?

O no! It was a letter about God and his greatness. A letter about himself and his vileness.

How came Nebuchadnezzar to write such a letter?

You shall hear. He had passed through great troubles. His heart had been changed; I believe it had been changed by the Spirit of God.

You shall hear the wonderful things that happened to him, and how God made this proud king humble and lowly as a child.

Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest man in all the world; nor has there ever been so great a king since. He was the head of gold. After he had finished his wars and was at rest and peace in his palace, he had a dream.

He saw a tree in the middle of the whole earth. It was very tall, but it grew taller and taller till it reached the skies, and everybody could see it, however far off. Its branches spread out wide, and were covered with leaves and a great deal of fruit; and birds lived

among the boughs, and beasts lay down under their shade. All this was beautiful and pleasant, but at last something happened in the dream which troubled the king very much as he lay upon his bed.

A watcher and an Holy One came down from heaven.

Was it an angel?

No; I think it was the Son of God Himself: the same that the king had seen walking in the furnace. He is the watcher, for He is always watching over men, and He is the Holy One of God.

This watcher cried aloud and said, 'Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the birds from his branches.'

Was not this a terrible command? Was such a fine, such a noble tree to be cut down?

Yes; but it was not to be rooted up. The watcher went on to say, 'Leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let *his portion be with the beasts of the earth.*'

Do you observe those words? It is not a *tree* only that is spoken of, but a *man.* The next words were dreadful indeed.

'Let his heart be changed from *man's*, and let a BEAST'S HEART be given to him; and let seven times pass over him.'

This was the command of the watchers and the holy ones; that is, of God,

his Son, and Spirit—the THREE-ONE GOD—and all this was to happen that the living might know that it was God who rules over ALL, and who had made the king the BASEST of men.

No wonder Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by this dream. He knew he was like this tree, because he was the greatest man on all the earth, and yet he was also the basest. Why? because he was the proudest.

Did Nebuchadnezzar send for Daniel to explain his dream?

No, not at *first*. Perhaps he thought Daniel would give him some bad meaning; for he knew well that he himself was walking in wicked ways. He sent for all the wise men of Babylon, but though he told them his dream, they could not tell him the meaning. It is strange that such deceitful men did

not invent a meaning out of their own heads; but perhaps they were afraid. At last Daniel came in.

The king said, 'O Belteshazzar, I know that the Spirit of the Holy gods is in thee.' It was true that the Spirit of God and His Christ dwelt in Daniel.

When the king had told his dream, Daniel looked very unhappy. But the king begged him to tell him the meaning whatever it might be. Then Daniel told him the dreadful meaning.

'It is such a dream,' said Daniel, 'as your enemies would like. That tree so high and so great, is thyself, O king.

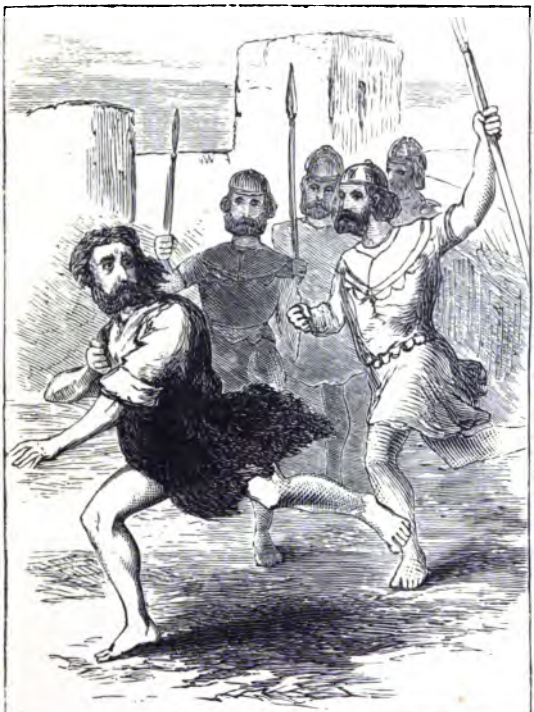
'And this is what God has commanded to happen. People shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and

they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.'

Daniel did not mention again those words—'the basest of men,' nor did he speak again of the beast's heart being given, for he did not wish to give the king more pain than he could help. But the king did not forget those words.

Daniel finished by entreating the king to turn away from his sins.

He had heard of Jonah many years before, preaching to the men of Nineveh, and saying, 'In forty days it shall be destroyed,' and how it was *not* destroyed because the people repented.



DANIEL, iv. 33.
'The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar, and he was driven from men.'—P. 76.

Daniel hoped that if Nebuchadnezzar repented, he would escape those terrible troubles.

The king was cruel to the poor. 'Oh,' said Daniel, 'show mercy to the poor!'

But Nebuchadnezzar did not repent of his sins, yet he did not punish Daniel for telling him the bad meaning of his dream, neither do we hear that he gave him any rewards; but Daniel did not want his rewards.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT PRIDE IS.

'What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'—1 Cor. iv. 7.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD ON PRIDE.

Dan. iv. 29 to end.

A YEAR passed away. The king was walking in his grand palace.

O what a palace it was!

There were gardens close to it called 'hanging gardens.' They were gardens one above another.

How could this be? Could trees be planted in the air? No; but there was a floor of lead on which a quantity of earth was put, and trees were planted there. Stairs led from one garden to

another. In the highest garden of all there was an engine to draw up water from the river below, and to make it flow into all the gardens. The wet could not get through the leaden floors, so the gardens were kept moist and fit for plants. It was delightful to walk in the highest garden of all. It was as high as the walls of Babylon—350 feet—(nearly as high as our great St. Paul's church).* The whole of the vast city could be seen from that tremendous height. These hanging gardens Nebuchadnezzar had built to please his queen, who came from the mountains of Media, and who liked high places and shady walks.

The king was very proud of his city of Babylon. Not only the hanging gardens were wonderful, but the walls,

* St. Paul's is 370 feet high.

the palace, and the temple of Belus (or Bel, or Baal).

The king had not built the whole city, but he had done much to make it strong and beautiful. Looking upon it, his heart was lifted up with pride, and he muttered these words (there may have been courtiers near who heard him)—

'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?'

These words were hardly spoken before a voice was heard from heaven saying, 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee, and they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, un-

til thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.'

These were the last words that Nebuchadnezzar heard, for immediately afterwards his understanding was taken away. His people drove him into the field, just as they would a horse or a cow.

What did he do for food? He bent down on all-fours and ate grass like an ox!

What did he do for clothes? He did not need them, for thick long hair grew all over his body, hair as long as an eagle's feathers, so that the king looked like a shaggy bear, though he still had the shape of a man. His nails being never cut, grew at last as long as a bird's claws.

The dew wet his body every night

and made the hair grow. The wet did not hurt the king any more than it hurts a beast.

All this time who sat upon the throne? The great men of the kingdom ruled; but no one was made king. It was well known that the king would have his senses again in seven years. In the dream it had been said, 'Leave the stump in the earth with a band of iron and brass.' And so it happened. The king's life was preserved, and his throne also.

What must Daniel have felt to see his king lying in the field like a beast! How the little children must have wondered!

No doubt Daniel prayed for the king. I am sure he never mocked him.

At last, when the seven years were over, Nebuchadnezzar lifted up his

eyes unto heaven. All this time he had kept them on the ground, as beasts always do. He had looked at his food, not at the sky. He had not been able to think of God. Now he lifted up his eyes and thought of God, and he blessed God. That was the right use to make of his speech.

His *last* words, before he lost his reason, had been boasting words about himself, but the first words when he had his reason again were thankful words to God.

He praised Him as the great King of kings, who has a right to do as He pleases, to whom nobody has a right to say, 'Why do you do so?'

Nebuchadnezzar did not feel angry with God for having made him so low and so vile; he felt that God had treated him as he deserved; he felt ashamed

of his pride, and very grateful to God for giving him back his mind.

Soon there came into the field the great lords. What were they come for?

To ask Nebuchadnezzar to return to his throne and be their king again. They had heard of his being restored to his reason, and so they had come.

Nebuchadnezzar soon looked as he had done before; indeed much grander and more glorious than before; but he was not proud as he used to be. He felt that God had made him great, and that God alone was to be praised. He wrote all about his troubles in a letter, and sent it to all people over whom he reigned. He ended his letter by saying,

'Now I praise the King of Heaven; those that walk in pride He is able to abase.'

Surely Nebuchadnezzar must have been changed in his heart, or he never would have written this letter. God first changed his heart from a man's to a beast's, and then changed his heart from a beast's to a saint's, and now, I trust He has changed it to be like an angel's heart. What was it brought Satan low in the beginning? It was pride. He was an angel, and by pride he became a devil. O let us beware of pride.

What is pride? To feel that we have made ourselves good or great or clever.

To feel that we have done good things by our own power. That is pride?

But the truth is, God has made us what we are, and given us what we have. He might have made us

worms instead of men ; and he could turn us from men into worms. But he wishes to turn us from men into angels. We must go to God to be changed. He can give us new hearts, not beasts' hearts, but angels' hearts. But we must come first humbly, like the prodigal, saying, 'I am not worthy to be called thy son.' Then God will have pity on us, and lift us up, and pardon our sins for Christ's sake, and take us to heaven, for He has said,

'He that humbleth *himself shall be exalted.*'

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION.

'I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.'—Ps. cxix. 75.

EVIL-MERODACH.

2 Kings, xxv. 27 to end.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR lived about a year (it is thought) after he was restored to his throne. Then he died.

His son was king after him.

His name was Evil-merodach.*

There is only one thing he did, written down in the Bible, and that

* That word 'evil' signified 'foolish,' and was a name given to him on account of the follies of his youth.

one thing was a good thing; it was a kind action.

There was in one of the prisons of Babylon an old man.

This old man had once been a king, but when he was quite young he had been conquered and taken to Babylon, and shut up there till his black hair was silvered over with grey. He had been a prisoner thirty-seven years. It seemed now as if he should die in prison.

But when Evil-merodach was made king, he went and took this old man out of prison, and spoke kindly to him.

He found him dressed in coarse clothes; he made him take these off, and he gave him nice clothes. He found him eating coarse food; he promised to send him some of his own

2 KINGS, XXV. 27.
'Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, did lift up the head of Jehoiachin out of prison'—P. 88.

dinner every day. Was not this kind of Evil-merodach ?

And who was this poor prisoner who had once been a king ? His name was Jehoiachin, and he had once been king of Judah. He was not the *last* king ; Zedekiah was the last king ; he was the *last* but one. He was the son of that wicked Jehoiakim, who cut up the roll of parchments on which God's words were written. At eighteen he had been made king, but he displeased God, and he was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, and taken to Babylon with his mother Nehushta. She had brought him up to be wicked.

What a long sorrowful life Jehoiachin had spent in prison. How often when shut up, he must have thought of the woods and hills near Jerusalem.

I hope too he thought of the sweet psalms of the Temple; for I think he repented of his sins. Jeremiah had once seen some figs in a basket, some very *good* and some very *bad*. God had said to Jeremiah, 'The bad figs are like the people left in Jerusalem, with Zedekiah: but the good figs are like the people taken to Babylon with Jehoiachin.' Then it was God made this promise: 'I will give them to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.'

So we may believe that God gave Jehoiachin a heart to know Him, and that He had mercy on him in his old age.

But Jehoiachin soon lost his kind friend Evil-merodach. After reigning two years that king was slain by his wicked brother-in-law.

We do not know what became of Jehoiachin when Evil-merodach was dead.

But it is probable that he died soon afterwards, as we never hear of him again.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUDDEN TERROR.

'My heart panteth, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath He turned into fear unto me.'—Isa. xxi. 4.

BELSHAZZAR.

Dan. v.

A FEW years passed away after Evil-merodach's death. Two kings reigned who had no right to the throne, but at last the son of Evil-merodach became king. He was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. His name was Belshazzar.

This name signifies Bel's riches. Bel is the same as Baal. Belshazzar was worthy of such a name, for he was fond of the gods of Babylon.

He did not care for Daniel, as his

grandfather had done, nor did he fear the God of Daniel.

Little did he think what that God was going to do to him and his kingdom.

It was in his reign that Babylon was to be destroyed.

There were armies from Persia and Media, watching for an opportunity of getting into the city: but they could not get in, for there was a deep river all round it, and a high wall, with strong brass gates.

For seventeen years Belshazzar sat upon his throne.

One night he gave a great feast. It was in the honour of his idols. He invited a thousand lords to the feast and a great many ladies also. It was thought a great honour to sit at table with this mighty king.

What a night of merriment it was! Suddenly a wicked thought came into Belshazzar's mind. He remembered the gold and silver cups that his grandfather had brought from Jerusalem. He thought he should like to drink wine out of them. They were in the idol's temple, adorning that horrible place. * What beautiful cups they were! But they were more than *beautiful*, they were *holy*. It was a dreadful sin to use them at an idol feast. Belshazzar knew that he was doing wickedly. He had heard how the God of Israel had punished his grandfather for his pride, and had made him eat grass like a beast. Yes, he *knew* this, and yet he was so bold as to drink to his gods out of these cups.

* Ezra, i. 7.

DANIEL, v. 5.
'In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote.'—P. 95.

But while the lords and ladies were drinking away and singing away in praise of their golden gods, suddenly a sight was seen which filled the king with terror and horror. It was a sight never seen before. Some fingers were seen writing on the wall, just where the great lamp sent its brightest light. The king's countenance grew dark with fear: his whole body shook so violently that his girdle was loosed, and his knees knocked against each other.

There was a good reason for his fear. How many people *now* would tremble, as he did, could they see God writing down in His book above, the wicked things they are doing. The king did not know it was the true God who had written the words on the wall. Had he known that he would not have called out, as he did, for the wise men

of Babylon. They came—the king promised that any one who could read the writing should have scarlet clothing and a chain of gold, and be made the third ruler of the kingdom.

But though they tried, they were not able to read the writing. I cannot tell the reason why : but so it was.

If Belshazzar was frightened before, he was more frightened *now*, and his lords as well as himself were terrified. But there enters another person into the vast hall of festivity. It was an aged person—it was a wise person. Was it Daniel ? No ; it was a woman, even the Queen. Not the wife of Belshazzar, but the *mother*. She was the widow of Evil-merodach. Perhaps it was she who had advised him to take Jehoiachin out of prison. She was a woman who had marked the

events that had happened. She had seen her proud father-in-law driven into the fields, and she had learned wisdom. Her name was Nitocris: she had not been present at the riotous feast, though Belshazzar's wives were there, and many other great ladies. She was now the greatest lady of all. It is probable that she was the second ruler in the kingdom.

When she entered the hall of festivity, she spoke respectfully to her trembling son, 'O king, live for ever!' Then she told him of Daniel.

Had Belshazzar never heard of him? He may have heard his name (see Dan. viii. 27) Belteshazzar, but he did not know him by the name of Daniel, nor did he know how wise he was; for the king was a man who did not think about prophets, but only

about pleasures, such as drinking wine and singing songs.

Nitocris entreated Belshazzar to send for Daniel.

The king did not laugh at her advice *that night.* He was glad to send for Daniel, or for any one who could help him; just as wicked people, when they are dying, are glad of any good minister to come to them.

Daniel was sent for: he was now an old man. It was many years since he had been seen at court; though once he was the greatest of all the lords of Babylon.

Belshazzar had never seen Daniel: he had never wished to see him. When that grey-headed holy man came in, Belshazzar asked him, 'Art thou that Daniel whom the king, my grandfather, brought from Judah with

other captives? I have heard of thee that the spirit of the holy Gods is in thee. The wise men cannot read this writing on the wall: if thou canst read it and explain it, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet and have a chain of gold round thy neck, and be the third ruler in the kingdom.'

Daniel did not care for rewards at any time; but *this night*—rewards would be of no use at all. Before Daniel explained the writing, he preached a sermon to Belshazzar. The first sermon that wicked monarch had ever heard from Daniel's lips. He began the sermon with these words, 'O thou King!' Then he reproached Belshazzar with not having been humbled by what happened to his grandfather. Daniel said, 'He was driven from the sons of men, and his *heart*

was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses, *till* he knew that the most high God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and sets up over it any man He pleases to make king. And thou, his grandson, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and thou and thy lords have drunk wine out of the cups of His house, and thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and thou hast not praised the God who gave thee health and everything. *This* is the reason why the fingers wrote upon the wall.'

After having told Belshazzar of his wickedness, Daniel began to explain

the writing on the wall. How anxiously every one listened to hear what he would say.

There were three words on the wall, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.* They meant —NUMBERED, WEIGHED, DIVIDED.

What was numbered?

The days of Belshazzar—how long he should be king.

What was weighed?

Belshazzar himself—to see whether he was humble or proud.

What was divided?

The kingdom of Babylon—it was given to the Medes and Persians.

What a terrible meaning! But Belshazzar was not angry with Daniel.

* Upharsin is spoken of as *Peres* in verse 28. The change in the word is only in the part of the verb, as in many of our words, such as bring, brought, draw, drew.

He gave him the rewards he had promised: he clothed him in scarlet and adorned him with a gold chain, and made him the third ruler in his kingdom.

But of what use were these rewards?

That very night the enemies rushed in.

How did they get in? The people of Babylon had forgotten to shut the gates of brass and to fasten them with the bars of iron. They had been feasting, and not watching.

The Medes and the Persians saw the gates wide open. But there was a deep river running round the city. How could the soldiers get over this river. Cyrus, king of Persia, found a way of drying up that river. There was a great deep pit into which the waters could be made to run when

there was too much rain. Cyrus said, 'We will let the water run into that deep pit.' His soldiers made haste and drew off the waters into the pit, and then they passed over the dry bottom of the river, and climbed up the other side, and rushed through the gates sword in hand, and burst into the palace of Belshazzar. There was Daniel in his scarlet clothing: there were the lords filled with wine: there was the trembling king: soon—very soon—he lay a dead man upon the palace floor.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BENEFIT OF PRAYER.

'O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come.'—Ps. lxv. 2.

DARIUS.

Dan. v. 31; vi. 1-3; ix.

THERE was now a new king over Babylon and all the countries. Darius the Mede was the chief, and his nephew Cyrus was the other king.

You remember the dream of the image. The head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his son's son. They were now all passed away. The arms and breast of silver were now come: they were the kings of Media and Persia.

The word of God had begun to be fulfilled.

It was Cyrus who had led the armies to Babylon: it was he who had conquered the city.

Darius remained in his own country of Media, but he heard of Daniel's having read the writing on the wall, and he sent for him to come to his palace, and he made him a very great man in that beautiful country of Media, a land of high mountains and thick woods.

But Daniel did not care for riches or honours. There was one thing dear to his heart, and it was the return of his people to Jerusalem. When Daniel was a little boy, there was a prophet preaching in the streets of Jerusalem, a prophet whose eyes often ran down with tears. His name

was Jeremiah. That prophet had long been dead, but what he had said was written down on rolls of parchment.

Daniel had got these rolls with him in Babylon, and he read them very attentively. One day he read these words,—

'After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon, I will visit you, and perform my good word towards you, in causing you to return to this place.' (Jer. xxix. 10.)

Daniel was pleased to read these words. He counted the years from the time he was taken captive, while Jehoiakim was still on the throne, and he found that 69 years had passed away. 'Oh!' thought he, 'the time is almost come. Let me go and pray to my God about it.'

So he went and prayed.

He felt it would be very kind of God to forgive the people the wicked things they had done when they lived in their own land.

So he not only prayed, he fasted that day, and put on sackcloth, and confessed the sins of the people, and his own sins. Though he had been so good from his youth, yet he felt that he was a great sinner.

'Oh!' said he, in his prayer. 'We have sinned and done wickedly. O Lord, hear, O Lord, forgive.'

THE LORD DID HEAR.

Just about three o'clock in the afternoon, just at the time when the evening sacrifice used to be offered up, an angel came, even the angel Gabriel, and touched Daniel. The old prophet had been praying all day. He was weak, and mournful, and hungry, his aged

body clothed in sackcloth, his grey hair covered with ashes, when he felt the angel's touch. The angel said, 'Thou art greatly beloved.'

Was not this a sweet message to bring from God?

The angel told Daniel that he had been flying very swiftly from the time the prayer began, and now he was come to tell him what he wanted to know. First the angel said there should be a commandment to build Jerusalem, and then nearly five hundred years would pass away, and at last Jesus would come and die for men.

This was glorious news for old Daniel to hear. He would never go back himself to Jerusalem, he was too old; but he wanted a Saviour to forgive his sins, and to make his people happy.

CHAPTER XXI.

DARIUS'S PRAISE OF THE INFINITE POWER OF GOD.

'He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.'—Dan. vi. 27.

THE DEN OF LIONS.

Dan. vi.

DANIEL was in great favour with Darius in the land of Media, but he had many enemies. The great men of the court did not like to see a stranger and a Jew placed above them all; and they were filled with envy, and made a plot to destroy him.

This wonderful history is related in the sixth chapter of Daniel so plainly

that all must understand it. But did you ever think when reading it, how like that den is to the Saviour and his tomb? Darius going to look for Daniel in the morning was like those holy women who came to anoint the Saviour's body; only Darius had more hope of finding Daniel alive, than these women had of finding Jesus alive; for Darius had not seen Daniel die, but the women had seen Jesus die, and so they had no hope of finding Him alive in His tomb.

What a friend Darius was to Daniel! How he comforted him as he was going into the den, saying, 'Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee.' And He *did* deliver him from those lions. But He delivered Jesus from worse lions, even from the devils of hell.

Did Darius believe in Daniel's God after this great deliverance?

Yes, he did, for he made a decree that every one should fear the God who delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Darius the Mede reigned two years after the taking of Babylon, and then he died.

Afterwards Cyrus the Persian was the only king. Did he honour Daniel? Yes, and he sent for him to Persia, to his palace on the river Tigris.*

It is a blessed thing for a king to have such a friend as Daniel. Cyrus was only a heathen, and he had never read the writings of the prophets, but Daniel had, and soon Cyrus read them too, and God gave him a heart to attend to what he read.

* Hiddekel is a name of the Tigris. Dan. x. 4.

PART THIRD.

RESTORATION FROM SEVENTY YEARS' CAPTIVITY.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOD KNOWS HIS CREATURES BEFORE THEY KNOW HIM.

'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.'—Isa. xlv. 5.

CYRUS'S LETTER (KING OF PERSIA AND OF ALL THE KINGDOMS).

Ezra, i. 1–3.

THIS king wrote a letter to all his people.

What was it about?

It was to tell everybody that God had made him king, and therefore had commanded him to build God a house at Jerusalem.

Had God commanded Cyrus to build Him a house? Yes. Long before Cyrus was born—a prophet at Jerusalem had called him by his name.

Isaiah was the prophet.

He had said nearly 200 years before this time,—

'Cyrus is my shepherd, and he shall say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and he shall say to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.' (Isa. xliv. 28.)

How did Cyrus know what Isaiah had written so long ago?

Daniel must have told him.

How much surprised Cyrus must

have been to see his name written down on the roll of parchment!

He found that God had foretold all about his taking Babylon. He read these words:—

'The Lord saith to Cyrus, I will open before him the two-leaved gates. I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.' (Isa. xlv. 2.)

Cyrus found out that the Lord knew him before he knew the Lord.

And does not the Lord know us all before we know Him? O yes! He knew *our* names before we were born, and could have told all we should do.

But I have not yet told you *all* that Cyrus wrote in his letter. He said, Let all the people of God return to Jerusalem, and build the house of God.

Was not this kind and generous?

How unlike Cyrus was to Pharaoh!

Pharaoh refused to let the people go from Egypt at the word of Moses, and continued to refuse when plague after plague was sent.

But Cyrus without any plagues let Israel go from Babylon.

What was the reason of this difference?

It is written, 'The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus.'

Every good thought, and wish, and word, and work, comes from God.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HE TO WHOM ALL TREASURES ARE COMMITTED.

'The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.'—John, iii. 35.

CYRUS'S GIFTS.

Ezra, i. 3–11.

CYRUS did even more than I have said. He commanded his people to help the poor Jews by giving them gold and silver for their journey, besides horses and camels and asses to ride upon.

And he told them to send presents to the God of Israel for His Temple.

But did he give nothing himself?

He himself gave the most magnificent presents. There were a great

many golden cups and basons in the Temple when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. Some had been cut to pieces, but some had been brought to Babylon, and had been placed in the idol's temple. Once they had been brought out to adorn a wicked feast. A thousand lords had drunk out of them the last night of their lives.

Cyrus desired all these gold and silver vessels to be counted.

Their number was five thousand and four hundred. What an immense weight they must have been!

It would be hard for a child to lift from the ground even one large gold bason.

These vessels would be of great use to the Jews when they had another temple; for they would need basons for the blood of the sacrifices, and

dishes for the flesh, and knives to cut up the limbs, and cups for wine to pour upon the sacrifices. All these golden vessels had been used in the temple by good Hezekiah and Josiah.

Who was to have the charge of these precious vessels? Not Daniel; for he was not going to return to Jerusalem. He was too old to make such a journey; for he was more than ninety. Besides, how could Cyrus spare him? Daniel was at the head of all the business of the kingdom.

But there was a man of the royal family going to return—a man born in Babylon—a young man, the grandson of a king.

Do you remember that poor King Jehoiachin who spent most of his life in prison, and who was at last taken out by Evil-merodach? He had a son

called Salathiel, and he had a son called Sheshbazzar. It was to this Sheshbazzar that Cyrus gave the charge of the vessels. Sheshbazzar was a good man. He was born in Babylon, but he was not to die there. He was to die in Jerusalem. His name Sheshbazzar was his Babylonish name. He had another better name. It was his Jewish name, and it meant a stranger in Babylon. It was Zerubbabel. You will hear of him chiefly by this name Zerubbabel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

'Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast.'—Deut. xvi. 13, 14.

THE RETURN.

Ezra, ii. 64–70; iii. 1–7.

It was a great company that set out from Babylon to go to Jerusalem—about fifty thousand. But what were fifty thousand compared to the millions who once left Egypt to go to Canaan?

Many of the Israelites preferred remaining in Babylon sooner than going to a ruined place; for they were very well off in Babylon, and had houses

and gardens of their own—houses which they had built themselves, and gardens which they had planted with their own hands. (See Jer. xxix. 5.)

Amongst the people who came up were some who did not belong to Israel. They were descended from those Gibeonites whom Joshua had spared many years ago. Their employment had been to hew wood and draw water for the house of God. They were called Nethinims, which means given up to God to be His servants. There were some others belonging to the nations of Canaan, called Solomon's servants. Many of these poor people returned, while many Israelites remained behind in Babylon. The governor Zerubbabel was called the Tirshatha.

The people brought with them a

number of camels and horses; but they had more asses than any other animal. There were plenty of sheep and cows in the land, grazing about in all the fields and gardens, without any one to take care of them.

The first place to which the people came was Jerusalem.

There they saw hills covered over with heaps of stones.

It was a sad sight to behold. Some old men had seen the place before it was destroyed, and they knew where the Temple used to stand. On that very spot they meant to build it up again. The chief of the Jews gave a great quantity of gold and silver, and also clothes for the priests. Having done this, the people went to look for places to dwell in during the summer; for that was the time for gathering in

food, both fruits and corn. When the summer was over, and the autumn was come, then the people all came together again to Jerusalem to see about building the Temple.

The first thing they did was to build up the altar. They could see where it once had stood. They offered burnt-offerings on the altar day by day, and they made great offerings besides for the feast of tabernacles. This was a beautiful feast, in which people sat in tents made of boughs of trees, and listened to the word of God as they sat together in the shade. The first day of the feast thirteen bullocks were slain on the altar, and one less every day till the seventh day, when seven bullocks were slain. All this the Israelites did just as it was written in the books of Moses. (Num. xxix.)

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST TEMPLE.

'And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'—Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

Ezra, iii. 7–13.

When the feast was over, the Jews consulted together about building the Temple. During the winter they collected wood and stones, and everything necessary before they set to work. They were able to get cedar-trees from Lebanon, just as Solomon had done, for King Cyrus had given them leave to send for the trees—nothing could be

done without his leave, as he was lord over all the countries.

At last the time came for laying the foundation of the Temple. This was a great event. The day fixed was in the spring—just after the feast of the Passover. Zerubbabel* was the chief man on this occasion; next to him was Joshua, the high-priest. These two good men together overlooked all that was done.

It was a beautiful sight; the white-robed priests standing with trumpets, and the singers with cymbals to praise the Lord. They sang the 136th Psalm. Every verse ends with the words, 'His mercy endureth for ever.'

* Zerubbabel was the same as Sheshbazzar. Sheshbazzar (Fire-worshipper) was the heathen name. Zerubbabel, born (son) at Babel, Jewish name.

After the joyful sound of that psalm a loud shout was heard; it was the shout of the people, who delighted to behold the first stone of the Temple.

But amidst these shouts of joy there were heard loud cries of grief. A few aged priests and aged princes were weeping bitterly, while the young people shouted for joy. What could be the reason of their tears?

They were men who had been taken captive in their youth, and who remembered the first temple in all its glory. They knew that this second temple could never be like the first.

And why not?

Because all its most glorious ornaments had been lost during the captivity in Babylon.

Where was the golden ark, with the tables of stone written by the finger

of God? Where was the holy fire which came from heaven? Where was the Urim and Thummim on the breastplate by which men could know the will of the Lord?

Where, O where was that glorious cloud in which fire used to descend and sit upon the mercy-seat between the cherubim? All these were lost. No wonder the aged men wept.

There were crowds of people standing on the hills around Jerusalem, and they could not tell what sound it was that they heard, whether it was the sound of joy or of woe.

It will not be so when God builds His last temple in the last days. Then there will be no weeping mingled with the joy, for God has said to Israel, 'Thou shalt weep no more.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE APOSTLE'S ANGER AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS.

'I would they were even cut off which trouble you.'—Gal. v. 12.

THE SAMARITANS' OFFER.

Ezra, iv.

WHILE the Israelites were busily engaged building their Temple, there came to them some men from another part of the land. They were Samaritans, and had been living in the land ever since the king of Assyria took captive the ten tribes with Hosea their king. (2 Kings, iv. 24.) These Samaritans came up to Zerubbabel and said, 'Let us help you to build, for we seek your God as you do, and we have done so for a long

while past — ever since the king of Assyria brought us to this land.'

Do you not think these men were very kind to wish to help the Jews? So it might appear; but do you know what sort of men they were? They worshipped idols as well as God, and doing this offends God more than not worshipping Him at all. (See 2 Kings, xvii.)

God was much displeased with these Samaritans, and did not count them as His people.

Zerubbabel and Joshua knew this, and so they answered boldly, 'We do not want your help. We ourselves will build a house for the Lord God of Israel, as Cyrus has allowed us to do.' Then the Samaritans were very angry, and they determined to worry and annoy the Jews while they were building.

And they did even worse; they got men to go to Persia to persuade King Cyrus to stop the building; and it was stopped for a long while.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST PROMISE TO DANIEL.

'Thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.'—Dan. xii. 13.

DANIEL AT THE HEIGHT OF HONOUR.

MEANWHILE what was Daniel doing?

He was at the court of Cyrus mourning and praying for his people the Jews.

He was now very very old—at least ninety years of age. He had spent his whole life, since he was a boy, in Babylon. Just lately he had been in Media, and now he was in Persia with King Cyrus. He could not return to his own country, for he was the chief ruler in Persia, next to the king. Even if he had been young he could not well

have left that high employment. He was like Moses, in being so great in a heathen court; but he was not, as Moses was, needed to bring his people to their land, for Cyrus had willingly let them go.

But did Daniel forget his own dear people? O no! Great as he was, clothed in scarlet and adorned with gold, he did not forget them; but he prayed for them, and mourned for them. How it must have grieved him to hear that the building of the Temple was stopped at Jerusalem.

But he knew where to go for comfort. Old as he was, for three full weeks he fasted. *Not* that he ate nothing (as Moses had done upon the Mount), but he ate nothing nice, nor did he taste meat, nor drink wine, nor anoint himself with oil.

DANIEL, X. 7.
'The men that were with me fled to hide themselves.'
P. 133.

It was the early spring, when the grass is of the freshest green, and when the flowers begin to blow, that he was on the banks of the great river Tigris. He had some servants and companions with him. Suddenly he lifted up his eyes and beheld a man dressed all in white and gold, with a face of dazzling brightness, and eyes like lamps of fire; even his feet and his hands shone like polished brass.

He spoke, and his voice was like the voice of a multitude all speaking together—so soft and so loud.

Who could this glorious person be?

Surely He was the Son of God; such as He appeared afterwards to the apostle John in the rocky isle of Patmos. (Rev. i.)

The men who were with Daniel were not able to look up to see this

glorious man. They were filled with terror, and they went to hide themselves in caves and thickets and wherever they could.

So Daniel was left alone. Though he did not hide himself, he felt all his strength go away, and he fell flat upon his face like one in a deep sleep; yet all the time he could hear the voice speaking to him.

But soon a hand touched him; it was the hand of an angel, who raised him a little from the ground, so that he rested upon his hands and his knees.

The angel told him to stand upright, for he was greatly beloved; then Daniel stood up, but trembling.

Then the angel told him that his prayers were heard, and that his people

should be delivered from the princes of Persia.

The angel told him a great deal more, even about the Jews till the time when Jesus comes again. And he gave Daniel this precious promise, —'They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.' (Dan. xii. 3.)

How bright will Daniel shine, in that great day when Jesus comes; for he spent all his life in turning sinners to righteousness. There never was a man who shone brighter on earth than Daniel: even Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest king in the world, listened to his words: Belshazzar trembled at his warnings, Darius loved him with tenderness, and Cyrus obeyed his voice. Angels were often sent to talk with him, and to comfort him.

But his greatest honour was being loved by the King of kings. With his own eyes he beheld Him before he died; with his own ears he heard His voice. And this King shall shine brighter than all the other stars, for He is the morning star, the loveliest of all.

PART FOURTH.

THE JEWS' LAST EFFORTS TO BUILD THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LORD'S PROMISE TO JERUSALEM IN THE LAST DAYS.

'Thus saith the Lord: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain.'—Zech. viii. 3.

HAGGAI.

The whole book.

DURING fourteen years the Jews lived in their land without a temple.

There was an altar at Jerusalem, but no temple.

The kings of Persia would not allow them to build. Daniel was dead and not able to plead for them any more.

All this time the Jews were very busy in building their own houses and planting their own gardens.

Soon they began not to care about the Temple. They ought to have sent letters to the kings of Persia to beg their leave to build the Temple. They ought to have fasted and prayed, but no, they were quite content to have no Temple. They said, 'We will build the Temple some day, but not *yet*; it is not *time* to build it yet.' The truth was they liked building their own houses better than God's house. Then God in His great mercy sent them a prophet to reprove them.

His name was Haggai. He came and spoke to the governor and the high-priest.

Zerubbabel was the governor, Jeshua was the high-priest. Haggai's first message was this: 'Why do the people say, It is not *time* to build the Lord's house? Is it time for you to live in your beautiful houses?'

Then Haggai told the people how it was that they were so poor and miserable.

Everything went wrong with them; their vines did not bear grapes, their olive-trees did not give good oil, their corn did not spring up in their fields, their cattle were weak and sickly; what food they had did not make them strong and healthy; nothing was right or pleasant.

And what was the reason?

The Lord's Temple was not built. So the Lord would not send dew nor rain enough to water the earth.

'Consider your ways,' said Haggai; 'consider your ways.'

Did the people attend to Haggai's message?

Yes, they did.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua set them a good example, and began to build; and the prophets helped them to build, and the people followed their example.

The Lord is always ready to praise those who do well.

Haggai soon brought another message from the Lord. It was very comforting, but very short. Only four words—'I AM WITH YOU.'

What a pleasant message! The people worked harder than before after

they heard these words! The Lord put it in their hearts to work.

Soon Haggai came again with the same message—'I am with you,' but he added many other promises about Jesus coming some day to bless His people.

In the winter Haggai said, 'You will have such a harvest next year, and the fruit-trees will bear such a quantity of fruit. The Lord says, From this day I will bless you.'

Soon afterwards another young prophet brought messages from God. His name was Zechariah; he helped to build the Temple. So there were four chief men working for God in the Temple—the governor, the high-priest, and the two prophets.*

* On a large cylinder deposited in the British Museum, there is inscribed a perfect copy of the

annals of Esar-haddon, in which the details are given of a large deportation of Israelites from Palestine, and a consequent settlement of Babylonian converts in their place. Ezra, vi. 1.

EZRA, v. 9.

'Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?'—P. 143.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LORD MAKES WHAT WAS MEANT FOR EVIL WORK FOR GOOD.

'But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.'—Gen. L. 20.

THE THREE HINDERERS.

Ezra, v. 3.

ONE day a number of men came towards the Jews as they were building.* Their king, Tatnai, was amongst them. They came up and said to the Jews, 'Who commanded you to build

* They were Syrians, and Tatnai, their governor, was with them. Syria was one of the twenty provinces of the Persian empire. Who could have set the Syrians against the Jews? Very likely the Samaritans had set the Syrians against the Jews, for spiteful people like to get others to join in their spite.

this house? and what are the names of the men who build it?'

Then the Jews answered boldly, 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.'

What a good answer this was! It showed they were not ashamed of their God. They went on to tell the Syrians all about the Temple: how Solomon had built it, and how Nebuchadnezzar had burnt it as a punishment for their sins, and how Cyrus had written down a commandment for them to build it again.

Then the Syrians said they would write to the King of Persia to know whether it was true that Cyrus allowed them to build it again.

So they wrote a letter to the King of Persia. There was a king called Darius now on the throne of Persia;

not the same Darius who had taken Daniel out of the den, he had long been dead; and so had Daniel and Cyrus too.

The Syrians began their letter thus: 'Unto Darius the king, all peace.'

Then in the letter they went on to ask him to look for the writing of Cyrus about building the temple.

Did Darius desire the decree to be looked for?

He did. It was not found in Babylon; but it was found in the palace in a town of Media, that country where Daniel was living when he was cast into the den of lions. There the roll of parchment was found with the decree of Cyrus written on it.

In that decree this was written: 'Let the house be builded, and let the expenses be paid by the king.'

When Darius read this roll, he wrote a letter to Tatnai, the governor, and the people who helped him, commanding them to let the Jews alone, and to give them every day rams and lambs, and corn, and salt, and wine, and oil, for their sacrifices. He ended this letter with this terrible threatening: 'If anybody disobeys this command, let his house be pulled down and made into a gallows to hang him on, and let his house be made into a dunghill.'

How did the hinderers feel when they received this letter?

They must have been sorry that they had ever written to Darius; for now they had to give a quantity of their things to the Jews, and *this* they did not like at all.

Now that the Jews worked in good

earnest the temple was soon finished. Four years was a short time for building such a beautiful place. All the time it was building the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, encouraged the people to go on, saying, 'Let your hands be strong.' (Zech. viii. 9.) The Lord gave a promise that the vine should yield abundance of grapes (ver. 12); but he added this charge, 'Speak ye every man truth to his neighbour.' (Ver. 16.)

CHAPTER XXX.

GOD COMFORTING HIS PEOPLE.

'As I thought to punish you when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the Lord of hosts, and I repented not, so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not.'—Dan. viii. 14, 15.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

Ezra, vi. 14 to end.

At last the day came for giving up the Temple to God; this was called the dedication.

A great number of rams and lambs and bullocks were offered up by the priests.

The Syrians were expected to help the Jews by giving these animals.

After the dedication the Passover

was eaten, and there was great joy for seven days; even some of the heathen cast away their idols in order to join in keeping this feast. Who had made the people so joyful?

It was the Lord. He had turned the heart of Darius to be kind.

So twenty years after the Jews had returned to their own land they had a temple once more.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DESOLATION OF THE JEWS.

'Your fathers where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?'—Zech. i. 5.

HINDERERS OF THE WALLS.

Ezra, iv. 6 to end.

FIFTY years passed away, and nothing can be known of what happened to the Jews.

They had a temple, and they had a high-priest, and they worshipped their God as in the days of old.

But they had no walls round their city.

It was a great work to build up those walls, and it would not be done quickly by such poor people as the Jews, for they had their families and

their cattle to care for. It was a hard matter to get food. How then could the walls be built up?

Yet still the people tried, and did as well as they could.

The Syrians hated them. They did not wish them to have walls. So they wrote a letter to the King of Persia to ask him to put a stop to the building.

They did not write to Darius, for he was dead, but to Artaxerxes.*

What did the Syrians say in their letter?

They called Jerusalem the *rebellious* and the *bad* city, and they said,—

'O king, if you allow the Jews to build up its walls, they will not pay

* This letter is supposed to be misplaced. It ought to follow Ezra, vi., whereas it is placed in Ezra, iv.

you any taxes. Only search in the old history books, and you will find what a rebellious city Jerusalem has always been, and that the city was once destroyed on that account.'

When Artaxerxes received this letter he desired his chief men to look and see whether Jerusalem had been a rebellious and bad city in past times. And so they looked in the old books, and they said to the king, 'Yes, it has often been rebellious.' This was true, for once Zedekiah had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

When Artaxerxes heard this, he told his chief men to write to the Syrians to stop the Jews from building their walls. And oh! how quickly did the Syrians run to Jerusalem to stop the building.

The poor Jews were obliged to leave

off working at their walls. There was no one to defend them, no one to beg the king to be kind to them.

Their prophets were dead, Haggai and Zechariah; their priest Jeshua was dead; their ruler Zerubbabel was dead. They had no great captain, nor prophet, nor priest, nor king; they were forlorn and desolate.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CHARACTER OF A GOOD MAN.

'Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.'—Ezra, vii. 10.

THE GOOD PRIEST.

Ezra, vii. 6–28.

BUT the Lord now raised up a man able to help his brethren. It was a Jew in Babylon. For only a *few* of the Jews had gone to Jerusalem when Cyrus set them free. Most of the Jews had remained in Babylon.

It came into the heart of a Jew named Ezra to wish to help his poor brethren in Jerusalem. Ezra was a

priest. He was also a scribe, that is, a writer who could explain the law of God to the people.

He was a very wise man, and a very good man.

This Ezra was in great favour with Artaxerxes, king of Persia. Just as Daniel was a favourite of Cyrus, so was Ezra a favourite of Artaxerxes.

Whatever he asked the king to do, the king did; for the Lord had made the king fond of him. Ezra had told the king a great deal about the true God, and the king had believed what Ezra said. It may be that God had changed the king's heart; for it is wonderful that a heathen king should so honour the God of Israel.

Ezra asked the king to allow him to

go to Jerusalem, and to take people with him.

But Ezra asked something more than this, for he knew his people were very poor. He asked the king to give him money to buy things for the Temple.

So the king gave Ezra a great deal of silver and gold. And the king wrote a letter to Ezra, to tell him all he promised to do for him.

The letter began thus, 'Artaxerxes, unto Ezra the priest.'

In the letter the king promised to give him whatever he wanted, and he desired every one to help him, and he told Ezra to punish all who would not obey the law of his God, and of the king.

Truly it was God who put it into

the king's heart to write such a letter, the kindest letter that ever was written by a rich king to a poor priest. This is what Ezra felt when he received the letter. He blessed God for having made the king write this kind letter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BLESSING OF THE LORD UPON TRAVELLERS.

'My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth and even for evermore.'—Ps. cxxi. 2, 8.

THE JOURNEY BEGUN.

Ezra, vii. last verse; viii.

THERE was a place in Babylon where all the people met together, who wished to go with Ezra to Jerusalem.

It was by the side of a river that they pitched their tents. No place is so good for travellers as a river-side, because water is near at hand, and trees generally grow on the banks, so

that travellers can have shade from the heat.

It was in the early spring when these Jews rested by that river; the birds were singing in the branches, and the flowers were blooming in the grass. In that hot country, the beginning of spring is the sweetest season of the year, and the best time for making a journey, as it is cool and fresh. Many little children were in the tents. They delight in playing among the flowers, when the sun shines.

How much pleased these children were to make a long journey with their fathers and mothers!

But there was one thing that made Ezra sad; it was the fear lest the wicked nations on the way should attack these poor Jews and take away their gold, and kill their little children.

So he said to all the people, 'Let us pray to God.' But, first, let us be sorry for our sins, and let us fast.

What is fasting? It is just the contrary of feasting. People who fast eat only a little, and do not eat nice things, but only dry bread, and they drink nothing but water.

All the people consented to fast and to pray, and the Lord heard their prayers.

Ezra might have asked the king of Persia to send soldiers with him to guard the people from their enemies; but he wished the King of Persia to know that God would keep them safe without soldiers, so he would not ask Him to send any.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEPARATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE FROM UNBELIEVERS.

'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?'—2 Cor. vi. 14.

THE SAD TIDINGS HEARD AT JERUSALEM.

Ezra, viii. 31, 32; ix.; x. 1–5.

AFTER staying twelve days by the river-side, Ezra commanded the people to pack up their tents and to set out on their journey. It was a pleasant day for the little children when they mounted their asses, or climbed upon the camels to sit on their backs beside their mothers! Every day the weather grew hotter as they went

along. At first there were only flowers, but afterwards there were all kinds of fruit hanging on the trees: figs and dates, pomegranates and plantains, and many more. These must have refreshed the weary travellers.

All through the spring they travelled till summer came. As they passed through the desert they could not tell what enemies might rush out upon them. There might be some hid in thickets or in pits, but not one enemy came near them to hurt them. God kept them safe.

At last the mountains of Jerusalem appeared in view. What joy to behold the temple glittering in the sun! It was now sixty years since it had been built the second time. There were many people in Jerusalem glad to receive them. Three days the

EZRA, viii. 28.
'Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also.
P. 163.

travellers stayed in the city. They did not forget to offer up sacrifice to God on His altar. These travellers had never offered sacrifices before. Though Ezra was a priest, he could not offer sacrifices in Babylon, for God had appointed Jerusalem as the place where He would set His name. But now he was come to Jerusalem he could join with the other priests in the holy work of the Temple.

At the end of three days most of the travellers left Jerusalem and went to other cities of Judah, or to the country places. As soon as they were gone the treasures of gold and silver were opened, the priests counted the vessels they had brought from Babylon, and they also weighed them. None of the vessels had been lost by the way. They were now placed in

the Temple for the service of God: basons for the blood, and censers for the incense, and shovels for the fire, and cups for the offering of wine and oil. How happy Ezra and his friends must have felt at first coming to Jerusalem!

But soon Ezra was saddened by hearing bad news. Some princes came to him, saying, 'There are many of the people of Israel, and even of the priests, who have married heathen women.'

When Ezra heard this accusation he was very sorrowful, for he knew that God had commanded His people never to have heathen wives. He showed his grief by tearing his clothes, and by plucking out some of the hair on his head and on his beard, and then he went to the Temple and sat

down there. Other good men came to him, and sat there with him, all grieving over the sins of Israel.

In this way we ought to feel when we hear of wicked deeds. We ought to be grieved because Jesus is grieved. Sin crucifies Jesus, as the nails once did.

Ezra sat all day on the ground till the time the lamb was offered up in the afternoon about three. Then he rose up, and knelt, while he opened wide his arms, and bowed down his head towards the earth. He opened his mouth and prayed aloud. The Holy Spirit taught him to pray.

He began his prayer by the words, 'O my God!' Next he said, 'I am ashamed to lift up my face unto Thee.' It was a very humble prayer. It was

like the prayer of Daniel. It was like the prayer of the poor publican. It was like the prayer of the prodigal son. Yet Ezra was a very good man. Yes; but he knew he was a sinner, and he hated sin.

In his prayer he told God what a *great sin* the people had committed, and while he prayed he wept; those who stood by and saw him weeping, wept also; there was a great deal of very bitter weeping.

As soon as Ezra had done praying, a man came up to him, and said, 'We have committed a great sin; but now let us make the promise to put away our heathen wives.'

So Ezra asked them to promise, and they *did* promise. It was a hard promise to make, and a harder promise to

keep. Many of the men loved their heathen wives exceedingly, and could not bear the thought of parting with them. Yet they determined to please God and to do what was right.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GOD'S EXHORTATION TO HIS PEOPLE TO SEPARATE FROM IDOLATERS.

'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' —2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

EZRA THE JUDGE.

Ezra, x. 6 to end.

It was a great comfort to Ezra to find the people ready to obey the Lord. He had neither eaten bread nor drunk water the whole day; he spent it in fasting, and weeping, and praying. How much wearied he must have felt that evening! He went into a little chamber near the Temple to refresh himself.

There were many little rooms close to the Temple where the priests took their meals, and dressed, and slept. In one of these little rooms he went that evening to have some food.*

Messengers were sent all over the land to command the men to come to Jerusalem immediately, and to tell them that any who did not come within three days should have all their things, and their lands, and houses taken away as a punishment.

What crowds of people flocked to Jerusalem during the next three days. It was now winter, and the rain was pouring down all day. It was sad to see the men standing in the rain, trembling all the while, because of the sins they had committed. There they

* Ezra, x. 6. The word '*when*' is in italics, and might well be changed for the word 'until.'

were in the courts of the Temple without shelter. Ezra stood up in the midst, and begged the people to confess whether they had taken heathen wives. Then the people answered with a loud voice, 'As thou hast said, so must we do.'

But there were so many who had married heathen wives that they could not all continue to stand in the rain till all the offenders were judged. So they all returned home that day, and a few came every day before the judges.

Ezra was the chief judge, but four others helped him. It took three months to judge all the men who had married heathen wives. If the wives had turned away from their idols, then they were *not* put away. God had always allowed His people to

EZRA, x. 3.

'Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them.'—P. 171.

marry women, who had turned from idols. Such a woman was Rahab, and such a woman was Ruth, and they both married good men of Israel. It may be that some of these heathen women had turned from their idols, but most of them had not; so they were sent away, and their children too were sent away with them, for their mothers had taught them to worship idols. It was a sad thing to see children taken away by their mothers to their old homes, there to be taught to go on worshipping idols.

Was it not a comfort for Ezra to see the people ready to mind God's law? Was it not a good thing for them that Ezra came all the way from Babylon? How much good Ezra had done in the course of one year! It was on New Year's day in

March that he left Babylon, and it was on the next New Year's day that he had settled everything concerning those Jews who had married heathen wives. Ezra continued to rule over the Jews for twelve more years.

PART FIFTH.

THE GREAT DELIVERANCE OF THE JEWS.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE EVIL OF DRINKING MUCH WINE.

'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.' —Prov. xx. 1.

THE GRAND FEAST.

Esth. i.

You have heard how unkind Artaxerxes had once been to the Jews.

He had sent a letter about them to the Syrians, and in this letter he said,

'Stop these men from building Jerusalem.'*

But Artaxerxes changed his mind afterwards, and wrote the kindest letter a king could write. He wrote this letter to Ezra the priest when he allowed him to go up to Jerusalem.†

What made the king change his mind? What made him turn from being so unkind to the Jews to being so very—very kind?

I will relate some events that happened to Ahasuerus in his palace in Persia just between the writing of the unkind letter and the kind letter. Six years passed away between the writing of these two letters. In another part of the Bible this king Artaxerxes is called Ahasuerus, and as we are not sure by what name he is called in the

* Ezra, iv. 21. † Ib. vii.

history of Persia, we will call him by his name Ahasuerus.

It was in the *first* year of his reign that Ahasuerus stopped the building of Jerusalem.

In the *third* year of his reign he made a great feast.

It was such a feast as is never heard of in these days; for it lasted *six months.* Every day for six months there was feasting in the palace. Great lords came from different countries to feast in the city of Shushan. All the countries belonged to Ahasuerus. What long journeys were made by these princes to come to the feast! Black men travelled from the mountains of Africa; and rich men came from India, the land of elephants; and brave men from Arabia's sandy deserts. But none of the guests

had ever seen such grandeur as they saw in the Persian palace. Persia was now the chief of the kingdoms, as Babylon once had been. You remember Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Babylon was the head of gold; Persia was the breast and arms of silver.

After the lords had been feasted for six months, the people of Shushan were feasted also. The king opened his gardens to every one in the place, whether rich or poor. For seven days the feast lasted. In the palace gardens there were tents of all colours, with silver rings to loop up the curtains, and pillars of marble to keep them up. Inside the tents were couches of gold and silver upon a marble pavement of red, blue, white, and black.* Upon

* Late discoverers have dug out the remains of the tesselated pavement and marble pillars here

these couches the visitors might rest while they drank wine out of golden cups. There was abundance of wine, and cups of every shape to drink out of; but the king would not allow any one to be forced to drink more than he wished; for some people are so wicked as to force their companions to drink too much. The king would not allow this: he desired that every one should have as much wine as he liked, and no more.

The king's wife was named Vashti. She also gave a feast in her part of the palace. The ladies came to Vashti's feast, but no men were allowed to come; for in Persia the ladies are always kept by themselves.

Much feasting makes people grow

spoken of, under the terrace of the king's palace in Shushan.

whimsical and wilful. So it was with the king. On the last day of all these feasts he drank a great deal of wine. Much wine turns the head, and makes people foolish. A foolish wish came into the king's mind. He thought he should like to show his wife to his company, that every one might see how beautiful she was. So he said to his seven chief servants (called chamberlains), 'Bring Vashti the queen with the crown upon her head.'

The chamberlains went into the queen's palace, and gave the message to the queen.

But she refused to come.

Was this wrong? It is true that women ought to obey their husbands, but not when they are commanded to act wrong. Vashti felt that it would be bold and vain to come into the

Esther, i. 12.

'Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment: therefore was the king very wroth.'—P. 179.

gardens just to show her beauty. Therefore she told the chamberlains that she would not come.

When the king heard this refusal he was very angry indeed. He was accustomed to be obeyed whatever he said, and it provoked him to think that his own wife would not mind him.

He might have desired some strong men to bring her by force; but he would not do this. He called the seven wise men of his kingdom, and asked their advice about Vashti. He said to them, 'What shall we do to Queen Vashti for not having obeyed the king's commandment?' One of the seven wise men, named Memucan, replied, 'If the other women in the kingdom hear that Vashti did not obey her husband, they also will not

obey their husbands; therefore let the king make a law (which cannot be altered) that Vashti come no more to see the king; but that another better woman be made queen instead.'

Was this good advice? No; very bad. Because Vashti had not set a bad example. It was the king who had set a bad example in giving such a wrong command. The counsellors ought to have advised the king to forgive her, and never to act so foolishly again himself.

But kings are surrounded by flatterers, who only try to please them.

The king took the bad advice Memucan had given him, and sent letters to all countries, showing how Vashti was to be punished for disobeying her husband.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DUTIFULNESS TO PARENTS.

'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.'—Eph. vi. 1.

THE NEW QUEEN.

Esth. ii. 1-21.

SOME time passed away, and the king began to feel sorry for his behaviour to Vashti. He must have loved her once, or he would not have made her queen. What had she done to lose his love? Nothing. Perhaps the king might have sent for her back, if it had not been for that bad rule of not altering laws. If it had not been for that rule among the Persians Daniel would never have been put in

the den of lions, and Vashti would have been placed on the throne again.

The king's servants who were always waiting on him soon saw what he was vexed about, and they proposed a plan to comfort him.

They said, 'Let all the beautiful young girls in the kingdom be brought to Shushan, and let the king choose which he likes best, that he may make her queen instead of Vashti.'

The king liked this plan, and he sent his chief servants to look for these beautiful maidens, and to bring them to his palace.

Now there lived very near the palace a Jew named Mordecai. His father had not gone back to Jerusalem when Cyrus had set the Jews free—eighty years before.

Mordecai had been born in the king-

dom of Persia and he now lived in the king's city of Shushan.

He had a young cousin living with him; he had adopted her as his daughter, for she was an orphan, and had lost her father and mother when she was very little. Mordecai was as fond of her as if she had been his own child. He had brought her up in the fear of God, and had taught her to love her own people the Jews, because they were God's people. This young girl obeyed Mordecai, as if he had been her father, and not only her cousin.

When the king's men searched for young girls, they came to Mordecai's house, and they saw this young girl. Mordecai called her Hadassah, but her Persian name was Esther. The king's men thought her so beautiful

that they forced her to come with them. They took her to the king's palace and placed her under the care of the head man named Hegai. As soon as Hegai saw her he liked her very much, and he gave her seven maids to wait upon her, and the best rooms in the house to live in.

Was young Esther happy in her grand chamber, with her train of servants? Did she not grieve to part from her friend and father? Did she not hate to dwell in a heathen palace, amongst worshippers of idols? We know she did, for she was a pious girl.

Mordecai felt very anxious about his dear child. He walked every day round about the house where Esther was; and though he could not see her or talk to her, he could

ESTHER, ii. 11.
'And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house.'—P. 184.

hear about her from the servants and send her messages.

There was one thing he had told her not to do; that thing was not to tell anybody that she was a Jewess.

Esther always obeyed her father, and she never told any one in the palace who she was, nor even that Mordecai was her cousin, or that he had brought her up. The people in the palace did not know why Mordecai was always walking near the part where Esther dwelt.

Esther lived a whole year in the palace before she was shown to the king. All this time her maids were pouring sweet things over her, and trying to make her look as lovely as possible.

At last the time came for Esther to be brought into the king's room, to be

looked at. Before she went out of her own room, she was allowed to take with her any precious things she wished for, whether jewels of gold, or ornaments of any kind. But Esther asked for nothing; she only took what Hegai, the keeper of the women, chose to give her.

When Esther appeared in the presence of the king, she was chosen to be his queen. Every one who saw Esther liked her, and the king thought he had never seen any one so lovely, so that he set the royal crown upon her fair young head.

Then he made a great feast, like the feast he once made when Vashti was his queen, and he called this feast—Esther's feast. He set many prisoners free at that feast, and he gave his favourites grand presents; so that

there was much rejoicing during the feast days. But the king did not behave to Esther as he had done to Vashti; he did not command her to appear before the company and show off her beauty with the crown on her head. She would never have obeyed such a command; though she obeyed all the good commands of her father Mordecai.

After she was queen she still obeyed Mordecai, as she used to do when she was a poor little girl, under his care.

She still kept her being a Jewess a secret: her dear Mordecai still forbade her to tell anybody who she was. He had his good reasons.

There was one thing that Mordecai desired more than anything else upon earth. It was that his own people the Jews might be helped and protected.

He knew that Jerusalem was not yet built up, and that there were many enemies wishing to hurt his people. He thought that Esther might persuade the king to do his people good, and that if it were not known that she was a Jewess, what she said would be listened to more than if it were known.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WISE MEN OFTEN FORGOTTEN.

'Now there was found in it (a city) a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.'—Eccles. ix. 15.

HAMAN'S ANGER.

Ezra, vii.; Esth. ii. 21 to end; iii. 1–5.

ABOUT this time the king sent Ezra the priest to Jerusalem, and wrote that kind letter to him promising to give him all he wanted.

Is it not probable that Esther had told the king about Ezra, and about Jerusalem?

But Esther asked no gifts for herself, nor for her beloved father; for

she knew he wanted nothing for himself.

Mordecai did not go with Ezra to Jerusalem. It was better for him to stay at Shushan and watch over Esther, and try to do his people good through her endeavours.

Mordecai now sat among the king's servants, in the gate of the palace. He liked to be as near to Esther as he could.

While sitting there he was able to save the king's life.

Two of the servants who waited in the palace were angry with the king, their master, and made a plan to kill him. These men had the charge of the door of the palace, and might have pierced the king with a dagger as he went in and out. In some way or other, Mordecai found out the horri-

ble crime these men meant to commit.

How did Mordecai prevent this wickedness being done? He sent a message to Queen Esther, begging her to let the king know of his danger. Esther told the king all about it, and she mentioned Mordecai as the man who had found out the deadly plot. The king sent his men to seize the two servants and to hang them up on a tree. This cursed end was what they well deserved.

But did not Mordecai deserve a reward? Yes; but he got none. No one remembered to reward him, and he never thought of asking for a reward. Nor did Esther ask the king to give him one. Mordecai was not a man who wanted earthly honour or riches, or anything for himself. It was

his people that he cared for, because they were the people of God. But though the king gave no reward to Mordecai, his servants wrote it down in a book, where all the chief things that happened were written.

There was a man in the kingdom named Haman. He belonged to the cursed nation of Amalek, that nation of whom the Lord had said, in the days of Moses, it is cursed for ever.*

This Haman got into the king's favour, and at last he was made the first of all the princes of Persia. It was a good thing when Joseph was made the first in Pharaoh's court; and when Daniel was made the first in

* Exod. xvii. It is supposed that Haman was descended from Agag, king of Amalek, and for this reason was called the Agagite.

Darius's court; but it was dreadful when Haman was made the first in the court of Ahasuerus.

The king thought so well of this Haman that he desired people to worship him as a god.* The king himself was worshipped as a god, and he wished Haman to have the same honour. When Haman went into the palace every one in the court knelt down, and then fell flat on their faces as he passed along.

Every one in the palace-court did so, except one, who never stirred, either to kneel or to fall down. Mordecai was not a man to worship any god but the true God. He had a brave and faithful heart such as those three young men had, who would not wor-

* The word 'reverence' means to fall prostrate.

ship the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up.

For some time Haman passed by without looking at Mordecai, or observing that he did not bow down. But the other servants in the gate observed it, and said to Mordecai, 'Why do you disobey the king's commandment?'

Mordecai could give them a good reason. It was, that he might obey the commandment of the King of kings —'Thou shalt have no gods but me.'

The servants went on teazing and tormenting Mordecai about his not bowing; but though they spoke to him every day, it was of no use; he bowed not down. He told them he was a Jew; he was not ashamed of his people, or of his God, though he had wise rea-

sons for wishing Esther not to tell who she was. The servants, finding they could not turn Mordecai, determined to complain of him to Haman. They told Haman that there was a Jew who would not bow down to him.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

UNFEELING HEARTS.

'And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.'—Esth. iii. 15.

HAMAN'S REVENGE.

Esth. iii. 5 to end.

WHEN Haman heard this, he looked as he passed, to see whether there was any one who did not bow down to him, and he saw that Mordecai did not. Then he was very angry indeed, and he determined to punish Mordecai very severely.

He thought to himself, 'I can easily get the king to allow me to hang Mordecai; but that will not be enough, I will try to get him to destroy ALL the Jews in his whole kingdom.'

Was not Haman a murderer? Was he not a child of the devil?

Heathens think some days are lucky and some are unlucky. Haman wanted to know what day would be the most lucky for him to have the Jews killed, so he got some wise men to cast lots for him. It was the first month, that is March, when Haman asked them to cast lots. Would the second month be lucky? No; the wise men said 'No.'

Would the third?—No.

The fourth?—No. Every month was unlucky till the twelfth month. The lucky day was the thirteenth of the twelfth month.

Haman would have a long while to wait for his lucky day. But would he ever see it? Would he live so long?

It was God Himself who directed the

lot, and made the wise men think the lucky day was so far off, for God was watching over His people to give them time to be delivered.

Haman had better have kept this wicked plan secret till the time was nearly come for doing it; but he was too angry to wait. He went immediately to the king and spoke in a very sly, deceitful manner.

He said, 'There is a people scattered over your kingdom who do not mind your laws. They will do your kingdom a great deal of harm. If it please the king let a law be written to destroy them.'

Was it not deceitful of Haman not to mention the name of this people? Ahasuerus had been very kind to the Jews. He had given Ezra leave to go to Jerusalem, and had promised him

ESTHER, iii. 10.
'And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman.'—P. 199.

all he wanted. Five years ago he had shown this kindness. Would he now command that they should be destroyed?

Surely he did not know what people Haman meant when he took off his ring and gave it to the Jews' enemy. On this ring was a seal; whoever had that seal could write what commands he pleased, for when people saw the king's seal on the writing, they would obey what was commanded.

Haman promised to give the king ten thousand talents of silver, which is as much as four millions of our money. But the king would not take the money, but told Haman *he* might have it all.

How did Haman mean to get the money? He meant to rob the Jews after he had killed them, and to let

the king have some of the money and to keep the rest. He was a robber as well as a murderer.

As soon as Haman had got the king's ring he went to the king's writers (called scribes) and told them to write letters to all the rulers in the kingdom, and in these letters to say, 'Let all the Jews be destroyed, whether young or old, whether women or babies.' All these letters were sealed with the king's ring. Then they were given to men who rode on swift horses to take to the most distant places in the kingdom. These letters were to be taken as far as Jerusalem, where good Ezra was teaching the people. The people in Shushan heard the dreadful decree sooner than any one else, and they were the first to be filled with sadness and fear.

Esther, iii. 15.
And the king and Haman sat down to drink.'—P. 201.

But what did Haman care for their sorrow? He went to the palace and sat there drinking with the king.

And what did Mordecai say when he heard what was done? Who could be as unhappy as he was? for it was on his account the decree had been made.

He rent his clothes, he put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and there he uttered a loud and bitter cry, then he returned to the king's gate, and sat just outside; for no one might go inside who wore sackcloth.

Thus every one saw how miserable Mordecai was, and he wished them to see it.

What sad scenes these riders beheld who bore the letters to distant lands! Wherever they came, as soon

as they read the decree, there was nothing but weeping and wailing among the Jews; and many fasted and lay in sackcloth and ashes.

CHAPTER XL.

ESTHER'S FAITHFUL ANSWER.

'And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.'—Esth. iv. 16.

THE QUEEN'S GRIEF.

Esth. iv. 1-9.

All this time the queen knew nothing of all these letters. The king had never told her a word, nor had he even seen her for some days. I do not wonder he did not want her company now he had grown fond of the company of Haman, for those who enjoy being with the wicked do not want to see the righteous, or to hear them talk.

The first that Esther heard of these

troubles was from her seven maids and seven men-servants, or chamberlains. They told her that Mordecai was sitting in sackcloth, weeping and wailing.

Then the queen was exceedingly grieved, and she sent some nice clothing to him with a request that he would take off his sackcloth.

But the messengers came back with the nice clothing in their hands, saying that Mordecai would not accept it.

Then Esther was very anxious to know what it was that had grieved Mordecai. There was one of her chamberlains, named Hatach, that she trusted more than the others, and she sent for him and told him to go and get Mordecai to tell him all about his grief.

So Hatach went out of the king's gate, and there he found Mordecai

sitting in his sackcloth, full of misery. Hatach told him that Queen Esther wanted to know what grieved him. Then Mordecai told him all about the king's letters, and about the money that Haman had promised to give the king—even four millions. But lest Esther should not believe the sad history, he sent her a copy of the king's decree that the riders were now taking into all countries.

Then Mordecai said to Hatach, 'Now tell Queen Esther that I charge her to go to the king, and to entreat him to save her people.'

You see that Mordecai called the Jews 'her people.' So Hatach knew that Esther was a Jewess. Perhaps Esther had told him this secret before; for it is plain that she trusted more in him than in her other chamberlains,

and she found him a good friend to her in the time of trouble.

What must Esther have felt when Hatach told her all the words of Mordecai, and showed her a copy of the king's letter about destroying the Jews! O poor Esther, what must she have felt! Before the end of the year *all her people* were to die. Mordecai himself was to die, not one was to be left! And the king her husband had made this horrible decree, and kept it secret from herself! Surely Esther had never felt such grief before.

To add to her grief, Mordecai had sent her a message to do a thing quite impossible. She had always obeyed her adopted father, but how could she obey him now?

She begged Hatach to go to him again with this message,—'No one is

allowed to go into the place where the king sits, unless sent for by the king; if any one does come in without being called, he is put to death—even a woman, if she comes in, is put to death, except the king holds out his golden sceptre to show that she may live; but as for me, the king has not called me for thirty days.'

This message Hatach took to Mordecai.

But what did Mordecai reply? Did he accept the excuse that Esther made for not going to the king?

O no! he sent back this message: 'If you say nothing to the king about the Jews, they will be saved in some way, and you and your relations will be destroyed. Who can tell but that you were made queen on purpose to help the Jews at this time?'

This message shows that Mordecai trusted in God. He knew that God had made promises to Abraham about his children, and he knew that God would not break His promises. He was quite sure that God would not let wicked men destroy His own people. Mordecai had faith. It was wrong of Esther to think of her own life when all her people were in danger.

Mordecai was too brave to care for his life. When he refused to worship Haman he knew that he risked his own life just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego once had done, and just as Daniel once had done. He was ready to go into a furnace, or into a den; but he could not bear that his people should be punished for his sake. He wanted Esther to be brave like himself.

And so she was, as we shall see.

Though at first she was afraid, yet when she heard Mordecai's last message, she determined to risk her life by entreating the king to spare the Jews. Again she sent a message to Mordecai. It was quite unlike the last message she sent.

It was a command to Mordecai. 'Get together all the Jews that are in Shushan, and fast all of you for *me*, and neither eat nor drink for three days. I and my maids will fast also; and then I will go to the king without leave: if I PERISH, I PERISH.'

Esther was now grown very brave. She was ready to die to save her people. But she knew that God could soften the king's heart, and so she wished Mordecai and all the Jews to

pray for her while she prayed in the palace with her maids.

This was the first time that Esther had commanded Mordecai.

Did Mordecai obey her command?

Oh, how readily he went and did *all* that Esther had commanded him!

Esther and her maids fasted for three days, and prayed to God.

CHAPTER XLI.

GOD'S POWER OVER THE HEART.

'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever He will.'—Prov. xxi. 1.

THE QUEEN'S REQUEST.

Esth. v.

At the end of three days Esther put on her beautiful garments fit for a queen. The time was now come for her to go to the king. He had not sent for her; perhaps he had been displeased with her. But Esther will go in, looking to God to incline the king's heart to love and to pity her.

She went into the room where the king was sitting on his grand throne.

Esther meekly stood before him, hoping for his favour. He looked at her and loved her. He stretched out his golden sceptre towards her. Esther came near and touched the tip of it.

Thus God had answered her prayers and softened the king's heart.

The king saw that Esther had something to ask him, but he did not wait for her to speak. He said himself, 'What is thy request, Queen Esther? it shall be given thee even to the half of my kingdom.' You must not think that the king would really have given her half his kingdom if she had asked it; he only spoke in this way without meaning what he said.

Did Esther now begin to entreat the king to spare the Jews? No; she did *not*. She knew it was better to wait. Besides she wanted to speak about the

Jews when Haman was near, that he might be punished immediately. So the queen answered, 'If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come *this day* unto the feast that I have prepared for him.'

Then the king sent to desire Haman to make haste to come to the feast.

In the evening both the king and Haman came to Esther's feast.

Haman did not know the queen was angry with him; indeed he thought she was very much pleased with him because she asked him to her feast, and no one else except the king. He felt very proud while he was sitting at the table near the king and queen.

While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, 'What is thy

request? it shall be granted, to the half of my kingdom.'

Did the queen now speak of the Jews, or of Haman's wickedness?

No, she did not.

She only said, 'If it please the king let the king and Haman come *to-morrow* to the feast that I shall prepare, and I will then tell my request.'

Esther knew the time was not yet come to plead for her people; but the next day was the right time, as you will see.

CHAPTER XLII.

WICKED BOASTING.

'Why boasteth thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man?'—Ps. lii. 1.

HAMAN'S HIGH SPIRITS.

Esth. v. 9 to end.

THAT evening Haman was in very high spirits. He went out of the king's palace thinking himself one of the happiest men on earth; but as he came to the gate there was some one there who put an end to his merriment. It was Mordecai, who had put off his sackcloth, because he knew that God would hear prayer and deliver the Jews. There he was again in the king's gate. Would he now bow to Haman? No, he was as determined

as ever not to worship that wicked man.

Haman looked at him to see what he would do. When he observed that he did not even stand up, he was in a furious passion. But he was too proud to show his passion in that public place. He kept it in and said nothing till he got home. He now felt that he could not wait eleven months to see Mordecai hanged: he wanted to kill him instantly. As soon as he was in his house, he called for his friends, and for Zeresh his wife. He had a great deal to say to them. He began by telling them about his great riches; they knew this before, but it was a pleasure to Haman to boast. Then he said, 'I have ten sons.' This they knew also, but they little knew how soon those ten sons would perish for

their father's wickedness. Then Haman spoke of the honour he had received from the king; that he was the greatest of all the king's princes; and, last of all, he said, 'Besides this, Esther the queen invited me to-day to a feast where there was none else but the king; and to-morrow I am to go to another feast at her house with the king.'

'But all this does me no good, while I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.'

As soon as his friends heard this speech, they joined together in proposing a most wicked plan. Zeresh, though a woman, was the first to mention it.

'Let a gallows be made to-night. Let it be very high. Go to the king to-morrow early, and ask the king to

allow you to hang Mordecai on it, and then when you have hanged him you can go merrily with the king to the feast.'

Haman liked this plan exceedingly, and he gave orders to his workmen about making the gallows that night. They were to be so very high that all the city might see Mordecai hanging from the top.

ESTHER, v. 14.

'Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high.'—P. 218.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CONFUSION OF THE WICKED.

'The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming.'—Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13.

HAMAN'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

Esth. vi. 1–11.

BUT while the gallows were being made, God was making a way for Mordecai to escape. That night the king could not sleep. It was the Lord who held his eyes open, so that he could find no rest upon his royal bed.

When a common person cannot sleep, he stays quietly in his bed, wishing for the morning, without disturbing anybody else.

But it was not so with a king of

Persia. He was like a spoiled child. If he could not sleep, his servants must stay awake to amuse him. What would amuse the king? Would it amuse him to hear sweet music, or to look at beautiful pictures? No, he would have a book read to him. What book? He did not want to have the Scriptures read to him. If he had, Esther would have read them to him. No, he wanted to hear the history of his own kingdom, and what had happened since he was made king. There was a great deal to his own praise in that history book. The book was brought, and a servant read it by the light of a lamp. The reader came to a place where it was said, 'Two of the king's servants, keepers of the door, made a plan to kill the king, but Mordecai the Jew found it out and told the king.'

Then the king interrupted the reader, 'What honour has Mordecai received, as a reward?'

'None,' replied the servants, 'there has been nothing done for him.'

How good it was of Mordecai never to ask for a reward!

He could easily have got Esther to remind the king to do something for him, but Mordecai cared not for earthly honour.

The king was in such haste to reward Mordecai that he asked whether there was anybody in the court. Yet it was quite early, too early to expect visitors to arrive. But one visitor was already come. The servants looked and said, 'Haman is standing in the court.'

Do you think the king was glad to hear Haman was there? 'Let him

come in,' said the king. But what had brought Haman there so early? He came to ask the king's leave to hang Mordecai. However the king did not inquire the reason of his coming, he asked another question which astonished Haman, and delighted him. It was this.

'What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?' Haman thought to himself, 'The king means me, for whom does he delight to honour as much as myself?'

So Haman replied,

'Let the man whom the king delighteth to honour be clothed in the king's royal garments, and let him ride on the king's own horse, and wear the king's own crown, and let one of the king's most noble princes bring him through the city and proclaim before

ESTHER, vi. 11.
'Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.'—P. 223.

him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."'

What a vain man Haman was to wish for such honour.

But what must have been his dismay and fury when the king said, 'Make haste, take the fine clothing, and the horse, and do all you have said to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate.'

Haman knew it would be of no use to refuse. Therefore he took the fine clothing and the horse, and did to Mordecai all that he had said. You may be sure that he did not call out very heartily, or very loud, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.'

How it must have tortured him to

utter those words, but he was forced to utter them. How glad he must have been when the ride was over and Mordecai had dismounted from the horse!

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE FATAL END OF PRIDE.

'Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.'—Prov. xvi. 18.

THE WICKED PUNISHED, THE RIGHTEOUS DELIVERED.

Esth. vi. 12 to end; vii.

BUT though glad the ceremony was over, Haman was miserable.

Mordecai returned to sit in the king's gate. He was not proud or puffed up. When no one noticed him he never grumbled, and when every one honoured him he never boasted.

But Haman went to his house mourning. He showed his grief by covering his head. He called together

those friends, who had given him such bad advice, and also that wife Zeresh, and he told them his troubles. The evening before he had boasted; now he complained. Yet he had nothing to complain of. If he had been humble he would not have minded Mordecai being honoured. It was only pride that made him miserable.

When his wife and his friends heard what had happened they did not try to comfort him. Some of his friends were wise men who pretended to be prophets. This time they said right.

'If Mordecai be one of the Jews, as you have begun to fall before him, so you will go on till you have fallen.'

Haman sat talking with these friends, till the king's servants came to tell him to come quickly to Esther's feast.

Once he thought he should go so

merrily to the banquet. Once he thought he should leave Mordecai hanging on the gallows, but there the gallows were ready, and no hope of Mordecai ever being placed on them. A more wretched man than Haman never went to a feast. How could he bear to see Mordecai again as he passed through the gate!

How much vexed he felt at remembering how he had been obliged to do him honour!

When Haman was at the feast, he did not venture to say a word against Mordecai. Little did he think what was going to be said about him. At last the king said to the queen, 'What is thy request? and it shall be granted even to the half of my kingdom.'

The queen replied, 'If I have found

favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my LIFE be given me at my petition, and my PEOPLE at my request; for we are sold, I and my people, to be SLAIN.

'If we had been sold as slaves, I would have said nothing, although it would have done great harm to the king.'

Esther knew that Haman had promised the king *money* to make up for his killing the Jews; therefore she said, 'We are sold.' The king was very angry when he heard any one had tried to hurt the queen's people: for he knew now that she was a Jewess, and he cried out, 'Who is he that was so daring as to think of such a thing?'

Then Esther said,—'The enemy is this wicked Haman.'

Now Haman saw that he was found

out. It was a terrible moment for him, worse even than when he was obliged to lead Mordecai in honour through the city. Haman was afraid as he stood before the king and the queen.

And he had good reason to be afraid: for great was the king's anger against him. So great was his anger that he rose from the table and went into the garden, leaving Haman alone with queen Esther. The terrified man saw that the king was determined to have him killed; but he hoped that he might persuade the queen to beg for him. How earnestly he entreated the queen to spare his life—so earnestly did he plead that he fell upon the couch on which she was resting.

At that moment the king returned from the garden, and seeing Haman so

near the queen, he was enraged at his want of respect.

His servants saw that Haman was to die, and they seized upon him and covered his face. That covering of his face was a sign that he was condemned to die. In the morning he had covered his *head*, as a sign of his wicked grief; now his face was covered against his will, as a sign of his certain death.

The chamberlains knew of the gallows that Haman had made for Mordecai, they must have seen it when they called Haman to the feast, for it was so high that nobody could avoid seeing it.

One of the chamberlains called Harbonah told the king of these high gallows. The king replied, 'Hang Haman thereon.' So Haman was hurried back to his house and hanged. He

ESTHER, vii. 10.
So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.'—P. 230.

had made the gallows one night, and he was hanged the next. How quickly his punishment came! One evening he returned home full of pride from the feast. The next evening he was dragged home covered with shame. What did his friends say when they beheld him brought back in disgrace? No doubt they said, 'It has happened as we said!' What did his wife say? was she sorry now that she had proposed those gallows being made? What did his ten sons say? what would become of them?

CHAPTER XLV.

THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE.

'The Lord redeemeth the souls of His servants, and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate.'—Ps. xxxiv. 22.

THE JOY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Esth. viii.

WHAT a comfort it was to Esther to find that the king loved her, as he used to do! She told him that Mordecai was her cousin, and that he had been a father to her from her childhood.

The king never knew this before. He sent for him, and when he saw him he gave him his own ring with a seal upon it, the very ring he had once given to Haman, but it had been

taken away from Haman when he was condemned to die. The king gave Esther all Haman's property, his house and lands and servants and money.

These things that Haman was so proud of now belonged to Esther. But she was not able to look after them herself, so she asked Mordecai to do it for her. He was now Esther's steward, and was very rich and honourable.

What pleasant conversation Esther could have with him now!

During the five years she had been married, she had loved him still and minded his commands, and sent him messages, but she had not been able to sit with him and to walk with him, and to talk with him and to pray with him.

But there was a great sorrow still

pressing upon Esther's heart and upon Mordecai's too.

It was true their lives were safe: but what would become of their own people the Jews? In the last month of the year they were all to be slain: for the letters had been sent out, and the rulers in every city were preparing to obey the command.

It was necessary for Esther to go again to speak to the king, without being called. She went in very humbly and very sorrowfully, falling down on her face and shedding bitter tears. This time she was not afraid of telling the king at first what she wanted, instead of asking him to a feast; for there was no wicked Haman now to speak against the Jews.

She begged the king, as she lay weeping, to do away with the horrible

plan of Haman. The king put out the golden sceptre towards his queen. Then Esther was encouraged. She rose up and stood before the king, but still she spoke very humbly, as to the greatest king in the world.

'If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let letters be written to contradict the letters, which Haman wrote to destroy the Jews. For how can I bear to see the evil that shall come upon my people? or to see the destruction of my relations?'

Esther shows us in her prayer to the king how we ought to pray to God; so humbly saying all the time, 'If it seem right in the Lord's eyes, do what I ask.' And we ought to ask

all in the name of Jesus, who only has found favour in God's sight.

It was a hard thing that Esther had asked, because you know, the laws of the Persians could not be altered. For that reason, Daniel was once put into the den of lions, because Darius could not change the law he had made though he desired to do it.

But the king allowed Esther and Mordecai to do anything they could to save the Jews.

Two months had now passed away since the wicked decree had been made, but there were still nine months to pass before the dreadful day of slaughter came.

Mordecai told the king of a plan by which the Jews might be saved.

The plan was this: To allow the Jews to *defend themselves.* The king's

writers were called, and they were told by Mordecai what to write. A great many letters were written to the king's governors in all countries, and other letters were written to the Jews, and they were all sealed with the king's ring—the same ring which Haman had sealed his letters with. In these letters the rulers were not forbidden to kill the Jews, but they were told that the Jews might defend themselves.

Riders on horses and camels took the letters, and they made all the haste they could; for the king was very anxious that they should go quickly to let the poor Jews know that they might fight for their lives.

After Mordecai had seen the riders set out, he left the palace. He did

not wear the same clothes he had worn when he entered, but beautiful garments of blue and white, and a cloak of purple, and crown of gold. His dress showed that he was made the greatest man in the kingdom, instead of Haman.

But did he wish people to fall down and worship him?

O no; he was kind and humble. All the people in Shushan were fond of him, and rejoiced that he was made great.

As for the Jews in Shushan, who can say how happy they were?

Wherever the messengers went with their letters, the people who heard them read were delighted, and made a feast, and had a good day. A little while before they had fasted and prayed; now they saw God had heard

their prayers; what reason they had to praise Him and to love Him!

Many of the heathen were turned from their idols to worship the God of Israel, and they joined themselves with the Jews to be His people.

Oh! would they hurt the Jews when the day for killing them came? They would help them. Other heathen people, though they did not turn to God, felt afraid of hurting the Jews, lest they should offend their God.

How busy the Jews were in every place in preparing to defend themselves when the dreadful day should come; but they knew that God would deliver them.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MAN'S WRATH UNABLE TO HURT GOD.

'Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee.'—Ps. lxxvi. 10.

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Esth. ix. 1-19.

At last the day came. It was in the last month of the year, the 13th day of Adar.

On that day the Jews in every place stood ready to defend themselves when attacked.

And did any one dare to attack them?

They did. Many did; and the consequence was they got killed. None but unbelieving, malicious men would venture to hurt the Jews. All the

king's governors, far from hurting the Jews, helped them. They were afraid of Mordecai, and they feared to offend him by hurting his people.

In Shushan, where the king lived, there were many enemies of the Jews, and among these enemies were the ten sons of Haman. Those ten sons were all killed by the Jews, and five hundred men besides. But none of the Jews took a single thing away that belonged to their enemies.

They knew that Mordecai wished them to take nothing, and they were all honest and generous in their conduct, and took nothing at all.

On the evening of the thirteenth day, the king was told that the Jews had killed five hundred of his people in the course of the day. Was he displeased? O no, he was pleased.

And he said to Esther, 'The Jews have slain five hundred men in Shushan, as well as the ten sons of Haman. How many more must have been killed in other places! Now what request do you make? Whatever you ask shall be granted.'

Esther answered, 'If it please the king may the Jews in Shushan be allowed to kill their enemies to-morrow as well as to-day, and may the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows?'

So the king granted these requests. The Jews were allowed to kill their enemies the next day. Were any people foolish enough to attack them? Yes, there were proud, stubborn men, that tried once more to kill the Jews. Three hundred of these men were killed. So, in all, eight hundred men

were slain in Shushan, but not one Jew.

What a sight it must have been, those ten brothers hanging up on the gallows! Their father's body had long ago been pecked by the birds of the air. Zeresh had no sons now to be proud of. All—all were hanged. No wonder they were wicked, when they had murderers for their father and their mother.

All this happened at Shushan. In the rest of the kingdom there was a great deal of fighting on the thirteenth day, so that seventy-five thousand men were killed by the Jews. The day afterwards, the fourteenth, the Jews kept a feast, and, no doubt, they thanked God at that feast as they had prayed to Him at their fast.

CHAPTER XLVII.

REMEMBRANCE OF GOD'S ACTS.

'They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness.'—Ps. cxlv. 7.

THE MEMORIALS OF THE DELIVERANCE.

Esth. ix. 20 to end; x.

THE Jews at Shushan could not feast on the fourteenth day, for they were fighting; but they feasted the next day, the fifteenth, and so there were two feast-days. There were many gifts sent to the poor on those days, that all hearts might be glad.

What days of thankfulness for Esther and for Mordecai in the palace! We know they loved God, and felt grate-

ful to Him for His great goodness in answering all their prayers.

Mordecai wished the Jews never to forget God's great deliverance, so he wrote letters to them all, telling them to keep these feast-days every year, and to call these days Purim, which means 'lots,' because Haman cast lots to know on which day he should kill the Jews, and God made the lot fall on a day a long while off.

Esther liked these feast-days very much, and she wrote more letters with Mordecai's help, telling the Jews over again to be sure to keep the feast of Purim every year always.

Another thing that Mordecai did to prevent the Jews forgetting God's goodness, was to write an account of all that had happened. The Holy Ghost told him what to write, and so

the book was joined with the other books of the Bible, and was called the Book of Esther. It might have been called the Book of Mordecai, but no doubt he preferred that his dear Esther's name should be the name of the book. It was an honour for a Jewish maiden to have a book of the Bible called by her name. For did she not risk her life in begging for her people? Yes, she did.

It is very remarkable that the name of God is not to be found in the book of Esther, nor is there any thing written about praying to Him, or about thanking Him, or about His laws or His temple. What can be the reason that the Holy Ghost did not move Mordecai to write about God?

Perhaps the reason was that if the name of Israel's God had been men-

tioned, the Persians might not have read the book. They might have said, 'It is about Israel's God, we will not read it.'

Was it not best that they should read it, and see what Israel's God had done? Who knows but some of the heathen after reading this book may have said, 'Who is the God of the Jews? I should like to have Him for my God. What wonders He has done for His people! He must be the true God.'

As for Mordecai he was made next unto the king himself. Like Joseph who was made next unto Pharaoh, like Daniel who was made next unto Darius, so was Mordecai made next unto Ahasuerus. He had not tried to be a great man, he had only tried to serve God; but he had been raised to this high place by God's power. And

how did he act when he became great? Did he still love the Jews? Yes, he did, and they loved him, and honoured him, as well they might. And Mordecai did them all the good he could, and spoke peace to them. No doubt he *spoke* to them of their God, though he did not write about Him in the book of Esther.

Mordecai affords us a faint picture of Jesus. He delivered us from a worse destruction, and is now at the right hand of God, watching over His people, and speaking peace to them by His Holy Spirit.

PART SIXTH.

THE JEWS' LAST EFFORTS TO BUILD THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.*

'Prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.'—Neh. i. 11.

THE BAD NEWS.

Neh. i.

WHEN Esther was queen, and Mordecai, chief ruler, it was a good time

* An excellent work for adults has been published by Nisbet, entitled, *Nehemiah, or the Tirshatha*, by Rev. M. Randall.

for the Jews in the court of Persia. One of them was made cup-bearer to the King Ahasuerus. He performed the same office which that butler once did whom Joseph knew in Egypt.

It was a great honour to be cup-bearer to the greatest king in the world. The name of the cup-bearer was Nehemiah. He remembered the time when Ezra the priest, and many of the Jews, had gone to Jerusalem. He had not gone with them, perhaps he was not allowed to go, but he often thought of them, and longed to know about them. Twelve years had now passed away since Ezra had left Shushan.

At this time Nehemiah was at Shushan, or Susen. That was the place where Persian kings always spent winter, for it was in the vale. In summer they went to the hills.

It was now the beginning of winter. Shushan was forty miles from Babylon.

One day Nehemiah saw one of his brother Jews named Hanani with some friends. They were just come from Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked them anxiously, 'How are the Jews there going on in Jerusalem?'

'Oh!' said they, 'people there are in such trouble; they are mocked and spoken against; the wall is broken down, and the gates are burned with fire.'

Nehemiah was much grieved to hear this account. He thought to himself, 'What can I do to help them? I will ask the king to allow me to go to Jerusalem, but first I will pray to God.'

So he sat down and wept, and he

would not eat nor drink: and he went on praying, and weeping, and fasting, for several days.

He made a very humble prayer to the God of heaven. In this prayer he confessed his sins, saying, 'Both I and my father's house have sinned,' and he ended his prayer with these words,—

'Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.'

You see, in speaking to God, he called the king this *man*, yet, when he speaks to the king himself, he uses very respectful language.

CHAPTER XLIX.

GOD'S POWER OVER ALL HEARTS.

'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.'—Prov. xxi. 1.

THE KING'S KINDNESS.

Neh. ii. 1–9.

FOUR months passed away without Nehemiah telling the king he wanted to go to Jerusalem.

He could not speak to the king unless the king spoke to him *first:* but he trusted in God to incline the king to notice him.

All this time Nehemiah felt very sad indeed. It was now April, a fit time for a journey; perhaps Nehemiah had waited for this sweet season, as the

best occasion to speak of his journey.

One day he was waiting on the king at dinner. It so happened that the queen was there, sitting by the king. We believe this queen was Esther, and we know what a comfort it would be to Nehemiah to see her there.

Just as Nehemiah was offering the cup of wine, the king said to him, 'Why do you look so sad: you are not sick: you are sorrowful in your heart?'

Nehemiah was very much afraid, at these words: for no one was allowed to look sad before the king. It is not pleasant to see people sad, and the kings of Persia chose to have everything pleasant about them.

Nehemiah answered the king with great reverence: 'Let the king live

for ever. How can I help being sad, when the city, where my fathers lie buried, is without walls, and the gates burned with fire?'

You see, he did not tell the king that Jerusalem was the city of the God of Heaven. It seems probable that the Jews were not allowed to speak of their God; for we saw that Mordecai never mentioned His name in the book he wrote.

The king did not answer Nehemiah angrily this time, but said, 'For what dost thou make request?'

Then Nehemiah prayed to the God of Heaven, that He might incline the king to grant his request. He could not kneel down nor speak aloud to God, but he prayed in his heart.

He answered, 'If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour

in thy sight, send me unto Judah, where is the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build the city.'

How glad Nehemiah was to see the queen sitting beside the king! It was not the custom for queens to be with the king, when he was talking to his people. It was a particular privilege allowed to Queen Esther, and even she was not allowed to speak: but perhaps she looked at the king with a beseeching look. Well he knew what Esther wished, and he took great delight in pleasing her.

The king said, 'How long will thy journey be? And when wilt thou return?'

These questions showed that the king would let him go; though he did not like him to be absent long.

Nehemiah told the king how long

NEHEMIAH, ii. 6.

'And the king said unto me, For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return?'– P. 256.

he would be away, and he obtained permission to go.

Then Nehemiah ventured to make another request.

He knew there were many enemies on the way; so he asked the king to write to all his rulers, to see that he passed safely through their countries.

The king granted this request also.

Nehemiah made one more request. It was for trees out of the king's forest, that he might have wood for the gates of Jerusalem, and for other purposes.

The king granted him all he asked for, and he even sent a troop of soldiers on horses with captains, to guard him by the way. Nehemiah did not go, as Ezra did, with a number of his friends, and of women and children; he went by himself.

Do you remember that Ezra would not ask the king for soldiers to guard him? The reason was, he had told the king that God took care of all His people. (See Ezra, viii. 22.) But Nehemiah had not been allowed to talk to the king about God: and so he did not refuse to have soldiers sent with him.

CHAPTER L.

GOD'S LOVE FOR ZION.

'Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion, build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.'—Ps. li. 18.

THE SEARCH BY MOONLIGHT.

Neh. ii. 10 to end.

It was April when Nehemiah obtained leave to go to Jerusalem. We may be sure that he lost no time in preparing for his long journey, which would last four months. Probably he went by the way that travellers still take, when a great many travel together.

There were forty miles from Shushan to Babylon on the great river Euphrates.

That fine city was not as grand as it

once was, but it was not then what it is now,—a heap of ruins.

Great Babylon was fifty miles all round: its walls were seventy feet high, and so broad—that two chariots might cross each other upon the top of the walls.

The palace was adorned by hanging gardens, or gardens one above another, looking like a flowery mountain.

When the Jewish troop left Babylon they passed through a wilderness without roads till they came to Tadmor in the wilderness, where Solomon had once built a magnificent city, since called Palmyra. But though in a wilderness it was well supplied with water. Therefore it was a good place for the troop to rest in and refresh themselves.

After travelling another hundred

miles, they reached Damascus, the chief town of Syria. This is the most ancient city in the world that we know of, and is not in ruins even now.

It was then, and is now, a city of gardens and fountains. What a sweet resting-place for the weary pilgrims, and still sweeter from the hope of arriving in another fortnight at beloved Jerusalem. They soon crossed the Jordan, and keeping close to the river to avoid the Samaritans, reached Jericho, and thence pursued the rocky way to Jerusalem. The travellers had never seen Jerusalem, though they had heard much. They entered quietly by one of its gates, called the gate of Damascus.

Nehemiah had not wished it to be known that he was coming; for he

knew there were enemies watching to do him harm.

But his coming was known. There were two men, called Sanballat and Tobiah, who heard of it with great grief. People came to them and said, 'There is a great man come from Persia to do good to the children of Israel.' This news made Sanballat and Tobiah more spiteful than ever.

Who were these two malicious men?

Sanballat was a Moabite,* and Tobiah was an Ammonite. You know Moab and Ammon were wicked nations descended from Lot, and living near the Dead Sea. These two enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, determined

* Sanballat is called the Horonite, from Horonaim, a city of Moab. Tobiah is called 'the servant,' because once a slave, and since set free.

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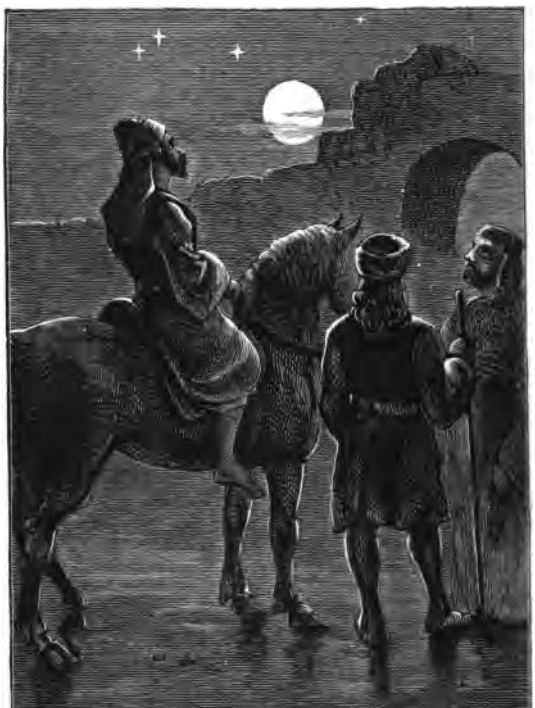

NEHEMIAH, ii. 12.
'And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me.'
P. 263.

to watch for an opportunity of harming Nehemiah.

Were there any persons in Jerusalem glad to see him?

All good persons there were glad to see him. If Ezra was there, and we think he was, Ezra was glad to see him. But Nehemiah told no one, not even Ezra, what he was going to do in Jerusalem. He kept it a secret from every man, and his reason was, he was afraid of the enemies coming and hindering him.

After he had been in Jerusalem three days, he got up one night and told some men to come with him. *They* went on foot, but he rode. It must have been a moonlight night or they could not have seen what they did.

Nehemiah went out by a gate called 'the Valley Gate,' and then he kept

riding just outside the city. He saw the broken-down walls, and the places where the gates once stood that had been burned. At one part near the king's pool (as it was called), there was such a heap of rubbish that Nehemiah could not ride any further that way; so he could not go all round the city, but he was obliged to turn back and go home by the gate he had come in by.

He was much grieved by the sight of the broken-down walls.

The next day he called together all the chief Jews and rulers, priests and nobles, and he told them all that was in his mind. He said, 'You see the distress we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and her gates are burned with fire; come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem.'

Then he told them all about his coming. He spoke a great deal of God's goodness in putting it into his heart to come to Jerusalem, and in making the king consent to his coming, and in keeping him safe as he went along.

When he had done speaking—the rulers and priests answered, 'Let us rise up and build.'

Only think how much rejoiced Nehemiah must have been to find all the chief men so ready to build the walls.

CHAPTER LI.

GOD HELPS ON HIS OWN WORK.

'We are labourers together with God. . . Ye are God's building.'—1 Cor. iii. 9.

THE BUILDERS.

Neh. ii. 19, 20.

How did Sanballat and Tobiah feel when they heard of what was going to be done? We know they felt angry and grieved, and they showed their spite by laughing at the Jews, as if they were not able to build the walls. There was another man who joined with Sanballat and Tobiah in laughing, he was Geshem an Arabian, from the country of Ishmael, and as Ishmael mocked Isaac, so he mocked the children of Isaac.

NEHEMIAH, ii. 19.
'They laughed us to scorn.'—P. 266.

These wicked men said that Nehemiah wanted to rebel against the King of Persia, but we know that the king approved all he did.

Nehemiah boldly answered his enemies. 'The God of heaven will prosper us; therefore we will arise and build: but you have nothing to do with Jerusalem.'

Of course the enemies were very much provoked by this answer.

So Nehemiah set about building the walls. All the people were willing to work. Each person undertook a piece of the wall.

The high-priest set the example. He, with the other priests, began to build the sheep-gate, where the sheep were brought into the Temple for sacrifices, and he built the wall near that gate. Some men built the fish-

gate ; some built the valley-gate ; some built the dung-gate ; and some built the fountain-gate ; some built the old gate ; some built the horse-gate ; some, the east-gate ; some, the water-gate ; and some, the prison-gate.*

Even the rich men joined in building : such as the goldsmiths and the merchants. People came from villages and towns near, to help to build. Men came from Jericho, forty miles off, and from other cities to help their brethren. One father was helped by his daughters,† who used what strength they had, though they might have acted like fine ladies and done nothing.

* The word Miphkad means 'punishment,' and was the name of the prison-gate (v. 31) ; thus they built all round till they came to the sheep-gate again.

† Verse 12.

Every one who dwelt in the city built the piece of the wall opposite his own house. The priests built the wall opposite the house of the high-priest, because the high-priest himself was building the sheep-gate which was the holy-gate.

CHAPTER LII.

WATCHFULNESS AND PRAYER.

'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.'—Eph. vi. 18.

ENEMIES JOIN AGAINST THE JEWS.

Neh. iv.

WHAT did Sanballat say when he heard that the Jews had really begun to build?

He was angry when they only *talked* of building, but when they really did build he was more angry, and he uttered more bitter mockeries than before.

This time he said in the hearing of all the enemies,—

'What are these weak Jews doing? They will never be able to build strong walls. How will they get stones for the walls, for the stones amongst the rubbish are too much burned to be fit for building?'

Tobiah (who stood by) had seen the walls, and he said, 'As for their walls, if only a fox were to climb over, he would break down these stone walls.' No doubt this was thought a very good joke of Tobiah, and no doubt many people laughed at it.

But there was one who heard it in heaven, who was much displeased.

Nehemiah also heard of these jeers, and he went to his God, and begged Him to punish the enemies, saying, 'Hear, O God; for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey

in the land of captivity, and cover not their iniquity.'*

The builders had heard what Sanballat and Tobiah had said, but they went on all the same working at the wall; they worked willingly and heartily, and very soon they had built half way up all round.

When Sanballat and his wicked neighbours heard how fast the wall was getting on, they were more angry than ever. They were no longer satisfied with mocking, they determined to come to fighting.

What would the poor Jews do if they had to fight as well as to build?

* We must remember that Nehemiah spoke as a prophet when he prayed that these wicked people might not be forgiven. Even Jesus would not pray for the son of perdition (John, xvii.); and John says, 'There is a sin unto death. I do not say he should pray for it.'

It was a sad time for Nehemiah.

Not only the enemies boasted; but some of the builders complained, saying, 'We are not able to build the wall, the burden-bearers are tired, and there is so much rubbish.'

Other Jews came from the enemies' land, and told Nehemiah that a plot had been made to kill all the builders. And this was true. The enemies had agreed suddenly to rush upon the builders and to kill them at their work.*

In this trouble Nehemiah went and prayed to God with the people, and then he set a watch day and night. He gave to all the builders swords, and spears, and bows and arrows, and he said to them, 'Be not afraid: remember the Lord is great and terrible,

* Neh. iv. 11, 12.

so fight for your brothers, and children, and wives, and houses.'

The enemies soon heard that the Jews were ready to fight, so they did not come, as they had intended.

Then Nehemiah let half the builders go on with their work, while the rest watched: thus they took turns. Every one had a sword by his side; and even when he was at work, he was ready to pull out his sword, in case the enemy attacked him.

But Nehemiah saw that the builders were not near enough together: a few worked at one part of the wall, and a few more in another part, so that if the enemies came, they might easily kill a few at a time, till they had killed all. So Nehemiah desired a trumpeter to stand by him, and to sound the trumpet, in case the enemies ap-

proached. Then Nehemiah said to all the rulers, 'When you hear the trumpet sound, come to me. Our God shall fight for us.'

So the people went on building, from the first light of morning till the stars began to shine; they worked and watched;—half worked, and the other half watched. At night no one went out of the city to lodge in the villages, but all slept in Jerusalem, and every one slept in the clothes he wore in the day, that he might be ready to stand up, in case the enemies suddenly came. It was only to have them washed that any one took off his clothes.

CHAPTER LIII.

GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF HIS SERVANTS.

'For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.'—Heb. vi. 10.

KINDNESS TO THE POOR.

Neh. v.

SURELY these builders with their working and their watching wanted plenty of food.

But some of them could not get bread enough for themselves and their families. These poor people came to Nehemiah complaining of the unkind conduct of the rich people.

They said, 'We have been obliged to give up our gardens, and our vine-

yards, and our houses, in order to get money to buy corn. And we have been obliged to sell some of our daughters as slaves to the rich people, and we cannot buy them back again, for we have nothing left.'

Nehemiah was angry with the rich people when he heard of their conduct to the poor. He felt that they ought to have helped their poor brethren freely, without asking for anything in return.

What was Nehemiah's duty?

It was his duty as governor to rebuke the covetous rulers.

So he called them all together, and said to them boldly,—

'What you do is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God, that the heathen may not be able to reproach us for wickedness?

'I pray you restore the fields and vineyards to the poor people.'

The rich people replied,—

'We will restore their lands to the poor, and we will not take their money any more.'

What a comfort this answer was to Nehemiah!

But he was afraid that the people might not keep their promise. So he called the priests and told them to make the people swear they would do as they had said.

Also, Nehemiah shook his garments, as if he was shaking something out of them, and he said to the rich men,—

'In this way God will shake out of His house every one who does not keep his promise!'

When the people heard him say this

they said, 'Amen,' and praised the Lord.

And did they keep their promise?

Yes, they did.

How happy the poor people must have been, to get their gardens and their fields again: and to see their young girls again who had been sold as slaves! What a blessing it was to the land to have such a governor as Nehemiah! He was like the Lord Jesus, of whom it is written,—

'He shall deliver the needy when he crieth: the poor also, and him that hath no helper.' Psalm lxxii. 12.

Nehemiah himself set a bright example to all the rulers.

He was rich; he had brought plenty of money with him from Persia. When he saw how poor most of the Jews were, he would not take anything from

them, though it was the custom for governors to receive presents of bread, wine, and money; but he did not follow wrong customs: he did not follow bad examples; but, when he saw others acting unjustly, he said, 'I will not do like them, because of the *fear of God.*'

Whenever we are tempted to do what others do, let us remember 'the fear of *God,*' and this will make us bold and brave; while the fear of *man* will make us timid and cowardly.

Nehemiah instead of *receiving* presents—*made* them.

Every day he had dinner prepared for all the Jews that came from distant places.

Hundreds of people sat down every day at Nehemiah's table.

What a dinner was spread upon

NEHEMIAH, v. 17.
'There were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers.'—P. 280.

the table! An ox and six sheep, besides plenty of chickens, and all sorts of wine.

It cost Nehemiah a great deal of money to buy so many animals every day; but he did all for the love of God, and of His people.

This was a prayer that he offered up to God:—

'Think upon me, my God, according to all that I have done for this people.'

You must not suppose that Nehemiah was proud of his goodness, like the Pharisee who prayed, 'O God, I thank thee I am not as other men.'

Nehemiah knew that he was a sinner like other men: and in one of his prayers, he said, 'Both I and my father's house have sinned, *we* have not kept Thy commandments.' (i. 7.)

But though Nehemiah confessed his sins, he knew that God would be pleased with his kindness to the Jews.

At the last day He will say to Nehemiah, 'I was an hungered, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world.'

CHAPTER LIV.

THE LORD DETECTS PLANS AGAINST HIS PEOPLE.

'The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect.'—Ps. xxxiii. 10.

VARIOUS DECEITFUL PLANS.

Neh. vi. 1–14.

SANBALLAT and Tobiah were the two great enemies of Nehemiah.

There was now a third enemy joining with Sanballat and Tobiah. He was Geshem the *Arabian*. He was a descendant of Ishmael, who mocked Isaac many hundreds of years ago.

They watched all he did, in hopes of finding out a way of doing him injury.

They had long openly mocked him, and abused him. But now they determined to see what could be done by deceit, and pretending to be friends. They now behaved like the old serpent who deceives the whole world.

They heard that the walls were finished, though the doors were not yet put up in the gateways. They thought if they could get Nehemiah out of Jerusalem, they might be able to get in and do some harm to the Jews.

So Sanballat sent a message to Nehemiah, saying, 'Come, meet me in one of the villages near Jerusalem.'

But Nehemiah sent back word that he could not come.

Was it not wise of him to refuse?

His message was, 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. If I were to leave the work, it

would not go on. Why then should I leave it to come down to you?'

Sanballat was much disappointed at this message. But he sent another invitation, and another, and another. Four times he sent, but all in vain. Nehemiah would not come.

At last Sanballat tried another plan, he sent a letter by his servant.

This letter was not a sealed letter, but an open one that any one could read. To send such a letter was very rude and insulting, but these wicked men wished to insult Nehemiah. In this letter he said, 'The heathens think that you Jews are going to rebel, and Geshem says you are going to do so, and that you are building the wall to make a king of your own.'

'Now,' said Sanballat, 'what will the king of Persia say, if he hears this re-

port? Do come to me, and let us talk together about what we had better do.'

Nehemiah wrote back word to him, 'What you say is not true; you have made it up out of your own mind.'

And it was not true. Sanballat had written lies like the father of lies. He wished to frighten the Jews, and make them afraid to set up the gates.

But Nehemiah prayed to God: 'O God, strengthen my hands.'

So we see this last wicked plan did not succeed.

But the enemies tried once more to injure Nehemiah.

There was a false prophet in Jerusalem named Shemaiah.

The enemies went to him and told him to ask Nehemiah to come and see

him, and they promised to reward him if he would do as they wished. So Shemaiah promised he would try to tempt Nehemiah to do wrong.

Nehemiah did not refuse to go and see Shemaiah in his house in Jerusalem. When he came, Shemaiah said, 'Do you know your enemies are coming to kill you in the night? Let us go into the temple courts at night; let us shut the doors.'

Would there be any harm in doing this?

Yes; it would seem as if Nehemiah were afraid.

'No,' said he; 'I will not go in.'

Nehemiah soon found out that Shemaiah was a false prophet; that he was giving him bad advice, and he would have nothing more to do with him.

He went to pray to God to save him from all the wicked people who were tempting him. There was a woman called Noadiah, who pretended to be a prophetess, and she also joined in the plans to deceive him.

CHAPTER LV.

BOASTING OF THE WICKED.

'His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity.' —Ps. x. 7.

THE WALL FINISHED.

Neh. vi. 15 to end; vii. 1-4.

AT last the wall was QUITE finished, even the doors were in the gates. The work had been done very quickly, in only fifty-two days, which is less than two months.

You remember Nehemiah set out on his journey in April.

It was in September the wall was finished.

How did the enemies feel? They felt very unhappy and much cast

down. They saw that God was on the side of the Jews, and that there was no use in striving against Him. Why then did they not turn to Him and serve Him? Ah! but they did not.

Tobiah often wrote letters to the great men of Jerusalem, for he had many friends in the city; he had married the daughter of one of the nobles, and his son had married the daughter of another nobleman. It was very wicked of these Jews to let their daughters marry Ammonites, and it grieved Nehemiah very much.

But there were people in Jerusalem who praised Tobiah as if he had been a good man, and who then went secretly and spoke against Nehemiah to Tobiah! O how ungrateful! Had not Nehemiah built up the walls

with so much trouble and at such expense.

It was not surprising that heathens hated him, but it was sad indeed for Jews to speak ill of him!

This made Tobiah very bold, and he wrote rude, boasting letters to frighten Nehemiah.

Though the wall was built and the doors set up, Nehemiah continued to guard the city with great care. He gave it into the charge of two good men, one was his brother Hanani, who had come to see him in Persia, and told him about Jerusalem. The other man was a friend named Hananiah, a very faithful man, who feared the Lord more than most did.

He said to these two men, Do not let the gates be opened very early in the morning. No doubt Nehemiah

wished the gates to be kept shut till the morning was quite light, lest enemies should burst in unawares, and he wished the gates to be very carefully locked at night, for the houses were not yet built, and the people were in great danger from enemies.

The great thing that Nehemiah wished to do, was to teach the people the law of God.

CHAPTER LVI.

NEHEMIAH'S CHARGE TO THE PEOPLE AFTER HEARING THE WORD.

'Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'—Neh. viii. 10.

THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS.

Neh. viii. 1-12.

THERE was a feast-day very near, called the feast of trumpets, when trumpets were blown. This feast took place in September. On this feast-day a great number of people came to Jerusalem.

A great high wooden place was set up in the midst of a broad street near the water-gate not far from the temple.

Who was it stood on this wooden platform with a great roll in his hand?

It was an old friend of the Jews, who had come up from Persia twelve years before. He had been a friend to them ever since, and now how glad he was to teach them the word of God! It was Ezra who read to the people that morning on the wooden platform. On one side of him stood six of the chief of the Jews, and on the other side seven more.

When Ezra unrolled the roll of the law, the people all stood up. This showed their respect for the worship of God. Before Ezra read he offered up a prayer. He blessed the Lord, the GREAT GOD. And all the people lifted up their hands and said, Amen, amen! and then they bowed their

NEHEMIAH, viii. 8.
'So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly.'
P. 294.

heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Oh, what a solemn sight it must have been! What good reason these people had to bless the Lord! How good He had been to them in giving them walls for their city, so that they could worship God in safety!

After the prayers Ezra began to read aloud. But all the people could not come near enough to hear his voice. So a great many priests and Levites stood in different spots, telling the people what Ezra was reading, and explaining to them the meaning.

There were children in the street that morning listening, as well as their parents; big children who were old enough to understand. The reading went on till noon. During six hours the people listened. Of course the

children and their mothers must have rested sometimes, and taken a little food, for they would have fainted if they had not refreshed themselves now and then, and we know that God does not like any one to be made ill by prayer or hearing the word.

After the people had listened to the reading, tears began to flow down their cheeks. What could make them weep?

It was the thought that they had not obeyed the Lord's commandments.

They did not know before what God had commanded, but now they saw what sinners they had been. They were like that good king Josiah, who wept when he heard the law of God.

But when Nehemiah and Ezra, and the Levites saw the people crying, they told them not to weep on *that day*, for

it was a day of rejoicing. When the reading was over, Nehemiah told the people to go and feast at home, eating meat and drinking wine, and not to forget to send a dinner to those poor people who could not afford to buy good dinners.

So the people went home, and were very joyful the rest of the day. They were very glad that they had heard the word of God explained to them, so that they could understand it.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE INSTITUTION OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

'Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: and thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates.'—Deut. xvi. 13, 14.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

Neh. viii. 13.

THE next day was not a feast-day, yet the people came again to hear the law read; and this time they heard that they ought soon to keep a feast called the feast of tabernacles or tents.

That was a delightful feast, for it was kept by making tents with large branches of trees, and then sitting in them to hear the word.

The people had a fortnight to prepare for this feast.

They went into the woods, and lopped the largest branches. It must have been charming to see the little children with boughs bigger than themselves, following their parents to the city. Soon the whole city looked like a forest; there were leafy tents upon the tops of the houses, as well as in the street, and in the courts of the temple.

With great joy the people sat during seven days under the boughs. There had never been such gladness in the land since first such tents had been made in the days of Joshua.

Day by day the people heard the word of God for seven days.

When this joyful feast was over, a fast was kept, to show the people's sorrow for their sins. During this fast the Levites preached and prayed in the streets from their wooden pulpits.

There was a long and beautiful prayer offered up by all the Levites.

CHAPTER LVIII.

EXHORTATIONS TO OBEDIENCE.

'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'—Isa. i. 16, 17.

THE COVENANT.

Neh. ix.

BEFORE the prayer began, all the people stood up and blessed God.

When the prayer was finished Nehemiah asked the people to make a promise to serve God. Such a promise is called a covenant. All the chief persons wrote down their names, and placed their seals to the covenant.

Nehemiah was the first to put down his name. There was only room on the paper for the names of the chief persons; but many others made the same covenant, women as well as men.

And what did they promise?

These were the principal things they promised.

1. Not to make marriages with the heathen.

2. Not to buy on the Sabbath day, even if heathen people brought things to sell.

3. To give something every year to pay for the sacrifices. Every one, however poor, promised to give about a shilling.

4. To bring the first-fruits that grew on their trees, and the first of their lambs, and kids, and calves, to

the house of God, for the priests and Levites.

All these things were written down in the covenant.

CHAPTER LIX.

REJOICING OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

'Ye that love the Lord, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of His saints; He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness.'—Ps. xcvii. 10, 12.

THE DEDICATION.

Neh. x.

JERUSALEM was now a safe city to dwell in with walls all round, but there were few people living in it, and there were very few houses to live in. Nehemiah wished to have it filled with people.

Would people *wish* to live there? They ought to prefer it to any other city, because the temple was there.

But many liked better living elsewhere. It was therefore settled that lots should be cast, for every tenth person to dwell in Jerusalem.

It was a joyful day when the walls of Jerusalem were set apart for the Lord; that day was called the dedication.

This was the way in which the wall was dedicated. One half of the princes of Judah went along the wall to the right, and the other half went the opposite way. So these two companies met in the midst.

As they went along, the priests blew trumpets, and the Levites played on their harps and sang psalms. Nehemiah went with one of the companies, and Ezra with the other. When these two companies met they stood still, and sang all together, and then went toge-

ther to the temple, and offered sacrifices and rejoiced. There were even little children who joined their sweet voices with their mothers in that loud song of praise. So loud was that song that the heathen could hear it a great way off. What must Tobiah and Sanballat have felt when they heard those joyful notes of praise.

Surely that day was a little like the heavenly day, when all the people of God shall meet round the throne of Jesus, and sing to their golden harps.

CHAPTER LX.

SALVATION COME TO THE SAMARITANS.

'Many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.' —John, iv. 41, 42.

NEHEMIAH'S RETURN FROM PERSIA TO JERUSALEM, AND THE EVILS HE DISCOVERED ON HIS RETURN.

Neh. xiii.

WHEN Nehemiah had asked leave of the king to go to Jerusalem, he had promised to go back.*

He did not forget his promise. At the end of twelve years he went back and stayed some time in Persia.

* Neh. ii. 6.

I wonder whether he found Queen Esther still alive, and that good Mordecai still ruling in Shushan. How glad they would be to hear of the walls having been built, and of the law having been taught!

He left behind him in Jerusalem Eliashib as high priest. Eliashib was not like his grandfather Joshua. He was unfaithful to his God, and he became friends with Tobiah, the Ammonite.

God had declared in his law that neither Ammonites nor Moabites should ever enter His temple, because of their hatred to Israel a long while ago in the wilderness.*

Yet Eliashib cared not for this law. He had the charge of a great many little rooms close to the temple. These

* Deut. xxiii. 3-6.

little rooms were to keep fruits in, and all kinds of things for the priests, and for the sacrifices; therefore they were counted holy places.

Tobiah wished to have some of these rooms for himself, and he asked Eliashib for them. Was not this bold and profane?

Eliashib gave him some rooms. All the holy things were removed, the flour, and the spices, the corn, the wine, and the oil, all were taken away, and the room was filled with Tobiah's furniture and food.

It was very sad for the people who worshipped in the temple, to see this wicked man scoffing at God and His holy service! But nothing could be done, as long as the high priest let him be there.

At last Nehemiah returned from

Persia. He soon heard of what Eliashib had done for Tobiah, and how he had prepared him a chamber in the courts of the temple.

How much grieved he felt! How dreadful it was to think that a High Priest had done such a thing!

Nehemiah was not afraid of Tobiah. He did not care about affronting him. All he thought of was doing his duty to his God. So he went straight to Tobiah's chamber and turned all the furniture out of it, and had everything destroyed. Then he commanded men to cleanse the chambers, (not that they were dirty), perhaps they were very clean and beautiful, and richly adorned, yet they needed cleansing, for they were unholy in God's sight. None could cleanse them but priests, and they sprinkled them with water mixed

with the ashes of a young cow.* When the chambers were purified, then Nehemiah had all the gold and silver cups brought back, with the flour and frankincense for the sacrifices. But there was no corn, nor wine, nor oil, to put into the rooms, for people had left off bringing their first-fruits for the Levites.

When Nehemiah looked around he saw there were hardly any Levites in the temple. He listened and he heard no sweet psalms. 'Where,' said he, 'are the Levites and the singers?' The people replied, 'They are working in their fields.'

And why were they working in the fields?

Because the people had given them no food.

* Num. xix.

Then Nehemiah was very angry with the rulers who had the charge of everything in his absence, and he said, 'Why is this house of God forsaken?' Do you remember how they had promised in the covenant to feed the Levites? Yet they had forgotten to do it, though they had signed their names and placed their seals to the covenant.

Nehemiah sent for the Levites from the field, and set them in their places. And now again the temple was made joyful by the sweet sound of psalms and by the sweet savour of offerings.

The people obeyed the commands of Nehemiah, and hastened to bring their sheaves of corn, their cruses of oil, and their bottles of wine for the support of the Levites. All they brought was stored up in the holy chambers, and faithful men were appointed to take

care of the food, and to give it out day by day.

When Nehemiah had settled these good plans, he went to his God, and prayed to Him to accept his services. He said, 'Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God.'

Nehemiah did not want the praise of man, he only wanted to please God. We know that God is pleased with all we do from love to Him, and He will say at the last day, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

Nehemiah soon found out another wicked thing the Jews did. Had they not promised in their covenant that they would keep the Sabbath,

and not buy anything which heathen people might offer to sell?

But they broke this promise.

Nehemiah saw country people on the Sabbath day treading grapes in the wine-press, and carrying sheaves of corn, and then loading asses with wine, and grapes, and figs, and bringing them into Jerusalem; and he saw men from the sea-side selling fish, and he saw Jews buying both fruit and fish.

Then Nehemiah was very angry with the rulers of the city, and said, 'What a wicked thing you do in profaning the Sabbath-day! Has not God punished you for it already? Why do you go on making God angry?

Then Nehemiah desired that the gates should be shut just before it was dark on Friday evening, and he for-

bade any one to open them till the Sabbath day was over, that is, till Saturday was gone. He could not trust the door-keepers, so he placed some of his own servants at the gates.

It vexed the fish-sellers and the fruiterers very much, when they found the gates shut on Friday evening. As they could not get in, they slept at the gates with their fish and fruit-baskets and their asses. They hoped to get in on Saturday morning, but they were disappointed. The trusty servants kept them out, and Nehemiah was much displeased and said, 'Why do you lodge there? If you do so again, I will have you taken up.' After *this*, they were afraid to come any more.

Nehemiah went to the Levites, to

choose some of them for door-keepers, every sabbath day.

Of course the wicked sellers were very angry with Nehemiah for sending them away, and many of the Jews who used to buy fruit and fish, must have been vexed to lose their nice things. But Nehemiah cared more for the favour of God, than for man's praise.

There was another sin which Nehemiah found out, a worse sin even than the Sabbath breaking. It was marrying heathen wives.

There were little children in Jerusalem who could not speak the Jews' language plainly, but mixed it up with the Philistine language.

It was sad to hear them talking this jargon, for it showed that one of their parents was a heathen. What sort of prayers must these little children have

been taught by their mothers,—prayers to Dagon as well as to God.

When Nehemiah heard what these children's fathers had done, he was very angry. He went to the wicked men and cursed them. Was that wrong? No; did not Elisha curse the children who mocked him? Nehemiah, like Elisha, cursed them in the name of God. He also beat some of them. He did more still; he plucked off part of their hair, as a disgrace.

These wicked men had despised God, and now men would despise them when they saw the bare patches on their heads and cheeks. But was this all Nehemiah did? No, he talked to them, and tried to persuade them to leave off their sin.

He reminded them of Solomon, and

of his miserable old age, through marrying ungodly women.

What Nehemiah said and did was of great use. Many did put away their heathen wives, especially the Levites.

You see how all the promises the people had made to God in the covenant they sealed, were broken; they had promised to support the Levites, to keep the Sabbath, and to avoid heathen women.

Not one of these things had they done. Even the wood had not been supplied for the altar. But Nehemiah set everything right, and then he prayed to God, saying: 'Remember me, O my God, for good.'

He would not have much thanks from *man*, but much hatred.

Amongst the priests, there was one more guilty than the rest: for he was the grandson of the high priest; and he was the great-grandson of that good Joshua, the friend of Zerubbabel.

This young man had married the daughter of Sanballat. You remember how intimate his grandfather was with Tobiah, and how he let him have a chamber in the temple courts. Of course he was intimate also with Sanballat, and thus his grandson became acquainted with the daughter.

Nehemiah could not persuade him to give her up, but he did not allow him to remain in Jerusalem. No indeed, Nehemiah drove him out. It is not written in the Bible where he went, but we read about him in another book written by Josephus.

This young man named Manasseh fled to Samaria, and built there a temple upon Mount Gerizim. If he could not be a priest in Jerusalem, he wickedly determined to be a priest in another place. He taught the Samaritans to worship in his new temple.

Thus he taught a whole nation to sin. How great was his guilt!

The Jews would have nothing to do with the Samaritan temple: nor would they even speak to the people.

Four hundred years after the building of that temple, a weary traveller sat down by the side of a well at the foot of Mount Gerizim.

A woman came to draw water from that well.

The traveller was a Jew, yet He spoke to that Samaritan woman, and even asked her for a draught

JOHN, iv. 20.
'Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.'
P. 320.

of water; but she refused His request. Yet so sweetly did He answer, and so wisely did He speak, that she soon perceived He was a prophet, and then she consulted Him about worshipping on that Mount Gerizim, in the temple there. The stranger told her that God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth; but, He added, 'Salvation is of the Jews;' and soon He told her He Himself was the Saviour of the world.

So life came to these Samaritans at last, notwithstanding the wickedness of their fathers. So may salvation come to all the ends of the earth, before Jesus comes again, A PEOPLE PREPARED FOR THE LORD.

QUESTIONS ON THE CAPTIVITY.

PART FIRST.

I.

1. Who was the last king of Judah?
2. How soon after he was taken was the city destroyed?
3. Where did King Nebuchadnezzar remain when Jerusalem was destroyed?
4. How far from Jerusalem was Riblah?
5. Who destroyed Jerusalem?
6. Who sent him to do it?
7. Whom did he find hidden there?
8. What did he do with Seraiah, the High Priest?

9. What king who once lived had brought on the burning of the Temple?
10. What was his great sin (2 Kings, xxi. 7)?
11. What was the state of Jerusalem when the captain left?
12. What things were taken to Riblah?
13. Were any priests left in Jerusalem?
14. Who were judged and slain at Riblah?
15. Who were not killed, but taken to Babylon?

II.

1. Where was Jeremiah when Jerusalem was taken?
2. To what place was he taken first?
3. Why did Nebuchadnezzar desire the captain to be kind to him?
4. What two things did he offer him to choose between?
5. Which did Jeremiah choose?
6. Who was made governor of the land?
7. What good man's grandson was Gedaliah?
8. Where did he live?

9. What did the captain give Jeremiah at parting?
10. What did Jeremiah see on Mount Zion?

III.

1. Did many people come to Mizpah?
2. Why did he not wish so many to stay with him?
3. What did they take baskets for?
4. How did they get oil?
5. How did God show His kindness in causing Jerusalem to be destroyed in summer?

IV.

1. What terrible thing did some captains tell Gedaliah?
2. Would he believe it?
3. Why did Johanan want to speak to Gedaliah alone?
4. Why would not Gedaliah believe it?
5. Who could have given him good advice?

V.

1. Whom did Gedaliah see enter Mizpah?
2. Why did he ask them to dine with him?
3. What happened at the feast?
4. Where did Ishmael throw the dead bodies?

VI.

1. What do the men carry in their hands?
2. Why are they sorrowful?
3. Why did Ishmael invite them to Mizpah?
4. How many did he kill?
5. Who helped him?
6. Why did he spare ten of the eighty?
7. Why did Ishmael leave Mizpah?
8. Who were the princesses with him?
9. Who were the first ten with Ishmael?
10. Who were the last ten?
11. To what king did he take them all?
12. Who was the good man with Ishmael?

VII.

1. Where did the people rest on the way to Ammon?
2. Whose army did they see?
3. For what did they come?
4. Who was frightened at the sight of them?
5. Where did Ishmael go?
6. How many followed him?
7. Who now took care of the remaining captives?
8. Why did he not take them back to Mizpah?
9. To what pleasant place did he take them back?
10. What pious man was with them?

VIII.

1. How did Johanan treat Jeremiah?
2. What was the present trouble of the people?
3. To whom did they come for advice?
4. Where did they wish to go?

5. How did Jeremiah know what to answer?
6. How long did he pray for them?
7. What did the Lord tell him to answer?
8. Why was the Lord displeased with them?
9. Where did they choose to go?

IX.

1. What rude answer did Johanan and the people make to Jeremiah?
2. What two prophets did they make go with them?
3. To what place in Egypt did they go?

X.

1. What was Jeremiah seen carrying in his hand?
2. Where did he hide the stones?
3. Did people know why he did so?
4. Did Jeremiah tell them the reason?
5. What did Jeremiah say would be set up in that place?

XI.

1. Whom did the people worship in Egypt?
2. What name did they give the Moon?
3. What did the children do?
4. What did the women do?
5. What did the men do?
6. What did Jeremiah tell them should happen to them?
7. What bold answer did the women give Jeremiah?
8. What king came into Egypt?
9. What happened to the king of Egypt?
10. What happened to the Jews in Egypt?
11. What happened to Jeremiah and Baruch?

PART SECOND.

XII.

1. Before the Jews took Jeremiah to Egypt, what other Jews had been taken captive to Babylon?
2. Whose great-grandsons were they?
3. What had Hezekiah done to displease God and to cause his great-grandsons to be taken to Babylon?
4. What precious things did Nebuchadnezzar take to Babylon with the young men?
5. Where did he place the golden vessels?
6. What sort of young men were these great-grandsons?
7. What were their Jewish names?
8. What new names were given to them by Nebuchadnezzar?
9. What was Daniel's Babylonish name?
10. What was the meaning of Belteshazzar?
11. What was the meaning of the other Babylonish names?

12. How was it they knew the meaning of their names?
13. Did they like the nice food that was brought them?
14. What request did they make to their keeper Ashpenaz?
15. Why did Ashpenaz not like the request?
16. What request did Daniel make to the head servant Melzar?
17. How did these four youths look at the end of ten days?
18. What food were they afterwards allowed to have?
19. What were the young men taught?
20. What did God teach Daniel?
21. What were these four youths chosen to be?

XIII.

1. What troubled Nebuchadnezzar one morning when he woke?
2. Whom did he first send for?
3. When they could not answer, what did he command to be done?

4. What was going to be done to Daniel and his friends?
6. Who told Daniel why the king was angry?
7. What did Daniel ask to be given him?
8. What did Daniel do with his friends?
9 Whom did God speak to in the night?
10. What was the first thing Daniel did after God had spoken to him?
11. What was the first request he made to the king?
12. What did he begin to relate to the king?

XIV.

1. What was the chief thing the dream was about?
2. What was the head made of?
3. What were the breast and arms made of?
4. The body and sides?
5. The legs?
6. The feet?
7. What did the king see cut out?
8. Was it cut out by the hands of man?

9. What did the stone knock down?
10. What carried away the broken bits?
11. What did the stone become?
12. What did Daniel say was the head?
13. What did he say were the silver arms?
14. What did he say were the brass body and sides?
15. What did he say were the iron legs?
16. Who was king of Rome when Jesus was born?
17. Has this kingdom of Rome come to an end?
18. What is the great kingdom now?
19. What are the kingdoms like now?
20. How many kingdoms will there be, last of all?
21. What little stone will be sent at last?
22. What will He do when He comes?
23. Who is this little stone?
24. To what is He likened in Rev. xix. 11?
25. What did the king do when he had heard the meaning of the dream?
26. How did he reward Daniel?
27. What did Daniel ask the king for his friends?

XV.

1. What did Nebuchadnezzar cause to be made after his dream had been explained?
2. In whose honour was it made?
3. How high was this image?
4. And how broad?
5. What was the reason of the image being so high?
6. Who was not made to come to worship this image?
7. Who were forced to come?
8. Who walked with them in the fire?

XVI.

1. To whom did Nebuchadnezzar write a letter?
2. What sort of a letter did he write?
3. How came such a wicked man to write a good letter?
4. How was this proud king made humble?
5. After the dream of the image of gold, what other dream did he have?

6. How broad was this tree?
7. What lived in the tree?
8. Whom did he see come down from heaven?
9. What did he desire to be done to the tree?
10. What did he command to be left of the tree?
11. What did he desire to be done with the heart?
12. Was it a man or a tree that was spoken of?
13. Did the king know he was like this tree?
14. Whom did the king send for at first?
15. Why did he not send for Daniel at first?
16. When Daniel heard the dream, why did he look unhappy?
17. What did Daniel say would happen to Nebuchadnezzar?
18. What sins did he ask him to leave off?
19. Did the king repent of his sins?
20. Did he punish Daniel?
21. Did he give him any reward?

XVII.

1. How long was it after the dream that the king was walking in his gardens?

2. Can you describe these gardens?
3. What did the king say in his pride?
4. What was said to him from heaven?
5. What did his people do to him?
6. Can you describe his state in the field?
7. How long did the king remain in the field?
8. What were the first words he spoke?
9. What did the lords come to the field for?
10. To whom did he write a letter?
11. What had brought the king so low?
12. What can make us high?

XVIII.

1. Who reigned after Nebuchadnezzar was dead?
2. To what old man was Evil-Merodach kind?
3. How long had that old man been in prison?
4. How long did Evil-Merodach reign?

XIX.

1. What was the name of the son of Evil-Merodach?

2. What was the meaning of the name Belshazzar?
3. Did he care for Daniel?
4. Who had tried to get into the city?
5. How many years did Belshazzar reign?
6. What feast did he give one night?
7. Whom did he invite to the feast?
8. What vessels did he send for?
9. Where were they kept?
10. What did he do with them?
11. What sight frightened him?
12. Why did that sight frighten him?
13. Whom did he call for to explain it?
14. What aged woman came in without being invited?
15. What did she say when she entered?
16. Whom did she speak to him of?
17. Had Belshazzar ever seen Daniel?
18. Why had he never sent for him before?
19. What did he now promise to give him if he would explain the writing?
20. Did Daniel explain the writing on the wall?
21. What were the three words written on the wall?
22. What was the meaning of Mene?

23. What of Tekel?
24. What of Upharsin?
25. How was Daniel rewarded?
26. How did the enemies get in?

XX.

1. Who was the new king over Babylon and all the countries?
2. Who was the king under him?
3. What was in the image like these two kings?
4. Who had led the armies to Babylon and conquered the city?
5. Where did Darius remain?
6. Whom did he hear of?
7. What did he hear of his having done?
8. Where did he invite him to come?
9. What prophet did Daniel remember when he was a little boy?
10. Had he ever read Jeremiah's writings?
11. What time was almost come?
12. What did he do when he found the time was nearly come?
13. Who was sent from heaven to answer his prayer?

14. What did the angel say to comfort him?
15. When did he say that Jesus would come?

XXI.

1. With whom was Daniel in great favour?
2. In what land?
3. Why were these princes so jealous of Daniel?
4. What does that den of lions represent?
5. Who came to look for Jesus at the tomb, as Darius looked for Daniel?
6. Who delivered Jesus from the tomb?
7. Who were worse than lions in Jesus' tomb?
8. Did Cyrus honour Daniel after Darius was dead?
9. Near what river was the palace of Cyrus?
10. What writings did Daniel show to Cyrus?

PART THIRD.

XXII.

1. For what did Cyrus write a letter to all people?
2. What had God commanded Cyrus to do?
3. What prophet had called him by his name two hundred years before?
4. What was Cyrus commanded to build?
5. Did he know what God had written?
6. Who had shown him what Isaiah had said?
7. Did Cyrus know the Lord had said he should take Babylon?
8. Does the Lord know everything that will happen before it happens?
9. Did he know our names before we were born?
10. Did he know all we should do?
11. What did Cyrus in his letter command all the people of Judah to do?
12. What king is Cyrus not like?

XXIII.

1. What did Cyrus desire people to do for the Jews?
2. What did he give them himself?
3. Of what use would these vessels be to the Jews?
4. Who had the charge of them?
5. What was his Jewish name?

XXIV.

1. How many Jews set out to go to Jerusalem?
2. Did all the Jews wish to leave Babylon?
3. Who were the Nethinims?
4. Who are called Solomon's servants?
5. What was Zerubbabel called?
6. At what place did all the company arrive?
7. Was the city in a good state?
8. Where did they sleep while they were preparing the Temple?
9. What feast did they keep at the end of the summer?

XXV.

1. About what did the Jews consult when they had kept the feast?
2. What had they collected in the winter?
3. What day was fixed for laying the foundation of the Temple?
4. Who was the chief person on that occasion?
5. Who was next to him?
6. What sounds were heard from the people around?
7. Who were weeping bitterly?
8. What had been lost in Babylon?
9. Will there be weeping as well as joy when Christ returns to build His temple?

XXVI.

1. Who offered to help the Jews to build the Temple?
2. Were these men very kind in wishing to help?

3. What did Zerubbabel and Joshua answer them?
4. How did they show their anger?

XXVII.

1. Where was Daniel in his extreme old age?
2. What was he doing in Persia?
3. Was he needed, as Moses was, to bring God's people to their land?
4. Did he forget them?
5. How did he show his care for them?
6. By what river was he?
7. What did he see by that river?
8. What did the servants do when this glorious being appeared?
9. What did Daniel do when he saw him?
10. What gave him a little strength?
11. What did the angel tell him to comfort him?
12. What precious promise did the angel repeat to him?
13. What was the highest honour he will receive?

PART FOURTH.

XXVIII.

1. How long did the Jews live in their land without the temple being finished?
2. Who hindered their building?
3. What were the Jews busy about?
4. Whom did God send to reprove them?
5. How did God show he was displeased?
6. What was Haggai's short disapproving message?
7. What were his comforting messages?
8. What other prophet came to him besides Haggai?
9. What four great men helped to build the temple?

XXIX.

1. Who was king Tatnai?
2. What did Tatnai and his men say to the Jews?

3. What did the Jews answer?
4. What did the Syrians write to the king of Persia about?
5. Who was now the king of Persia?
6. What did he ask Darius to look for?
7. Where was it found?
8. What was written on the roll that was found?
9. What terrible threat did Darius write in his letter?
10. How soon did they finish the Temple?
11. What did the prophets often say to the people while they were building?

XXX.

1. What feast was held when the Temple was finished?
2. What strangers were expected to help by giving sacrifices?

XXXI.

1. How many years passed away without anything being known of the Jews?

2. What had they got?
3. What were they still in need of?
4. Who wrote a letter?
5. To whom did they write against the Jews?
6. What did they say of Jerusalem?
7. What did Artaxerxes desire his chief men to look for?

XXXII.

1. Who was Ezra?
2. Why did he wish to go up to Jerusalem?
3. What king favoured him?
4. Why did he write to the king?
5. What did the king promise him in his answer?

XXXIII.

1. At what sort of place did all the people meet together to begin their journey?
2. What made Ezra sad?

3. What did Ezra and his people first before they set out on their journey?
4. Why had not Ezra asked for soldiers to guard them on their way?

XXXIV.

1. Were the people long travelling to Jerusalem?
2. How long had the new temple been built?
3. Why had Ezra not offered up sacrifices in Babylon?
4. What did he now in Jerusalem?
5. After three days where did most of the people go?
6. What bad news at last made Ezra sad?
7. How did he show his grief?
8. How long did he sit on the ground?
9. At what hour did he begin to pray?
10. What did he say in his prayer?
11. What did a man at last say that cheered him?
12. What did Ezra ask the people to promise?

XXXV.

1. When Ezra was comforted, where did he go to refresh himself?
2. What message did he send to people all over the land?
3. Did the people come?
4. What made them uncomfortable while standing in the courts?
5. What did Ezra ask them to confess?
6. Did they confess?
7. Why did he tell them to go home?
8. Who judged them?
9. How long did it take to judge those who had taken heathen wives?
10. What wives would not have to be put away?
11. When did Ezra set out on his journey to Jerusalem?
12. When did he finish judging the men who had married heathen wives?

PART FIFTH.

XXXVI.

1. What unkindness had Artaxerxes once done to the Jews?
2. What kindness did he afterwards show them?
3. By what name is he called in the book of Esther?
4. Is Ahasuerus the same as Artaxerxes in Ezra?
5. When did he so unkindly stop the building of Jerusalem?
6. When did he make a great feast?
7. How long did the feast last?
8. Who came to it?
9. What was the king's palace called?
10. What did they do at the feast?
11. What was the name of the queen?
12. Towards the end of the feast what did the king desire his wife to do?
13. Did she refuse?
14. How did his wise men advise him to punish Vashti?

XXXVII.

1. What old man did the servants find, with a young girl, living with him, as his daughter?
2. What was her Jewish name?
3. Where did the king's men force her to go?
4. Was Esther happy in her new place?
5. Why used Mordecai to walk near the palace?
6. How long did Esther live in the palace before she was brought to the king?
7. What was she allowed to do when she went away?
8. Did she take anything with her?
9. Whom did the king choose to be his queen?
10. What did he do in honour of the queen?
11. Whom did she still obey?
12. What was Mordecai most anxious about in his heart?

XXXVIII.

1. What good priest went up to Jerusalem about this time?

2. What great benefit was Mordecai able to confer on the king?
3. Did Mordecai receive any reward for this service?
4. Of what nation was Haman?
5. Was it a good thing that Haman was the king's favourite?
6. What did the king wish to be done to Haman by every one?
7. Who would not do it?
8. What was Mordecai's reason for not bowing?

XXXIX.

1. Why did Haman wish to have Mordecai hanged?
2. What did he wish besides?
3. What did Haman wish to find out before he fixed on the day for his murders?
4. How did he try to find out which would be the lucky day?
5. Which was it?
6. Was it far off or near?
7. Who overruled the lot to make it fall on such a distant day?

8. Who told the king first of Haman's plot?
9. Why did the king give Haman a ring with his seal on it?
10. What had Haman now the power to do?
11. What did Haman desire the scribes to do?
12. Who first heard of the wicked plot?
13. Who was the most miserable Jew in the kingdom?

XL.

1. Did the queen know of the letters Haman had sent?
2. Why had not the king told her?
3. Who was the first to tell her Mordecai was sitting in sackcloth, weeping?
4. What did the messengers bring back in their hands?
5. Who was Hatach?
6. What did Esther tell him to ask Mordecai?
7. What was his answer?
8. How much had Haman promised to give the king?
9. What message did Mordecai send to the queen by Hatach?

10. Did Hatach know she was a Jewess?
11. What did Hatach show to Esther?
12. What did Mordecai desire her to do?
13. Why could not Esther go and speak to the king?
14. What did Mordecai tell her was her duty?
15. What did Esther command Mordecai to do?
16. Did he obey her?

XLI.

1. How soon did Esther go to the king?
2. How did the king feel when he saw her?
3. How did he show his favour?
4. What did he ask the queen?
5. What request did the queen make?
6. Why did Haman feel prouder than ever?
7. What did the king ask Esther at the feast?

XLII.

1. How was Haman's merriment damped?
2. What was the name of Haman's wife?
3. What did Haman boast about to his wife and friends?
4. Whom did he complain of to his wife and friends?

5. What did Zeresh propose to have done immediately?
6. What did Haman desire to be made that night?

XLIII.

1. What was done to amuse the king when he could not sleep?
2. Had any reward been given to Mordecai?
3. What did the king inquire when it was morning?
4. Whom did the servants see in the court?
5. Why had Haman come so early?
6. What question did the king ask Haman?
7. Whom did Haman think the king meant by his question?
8. Whom did the king really mean?
9. What did the king desire Haman to do?
10. Did he obey the king?

XLIV.

1. To what place did Mordecai return after receiving his honours?
2. What complaints did Haman make to his friends?

3. What comfort did they give him?
5. In what state of mind did Haman go to Esther's feast?
5. What did the king say to the queen at the feast?
6. What did the queen answer?
7. Who left the table in a passion?
8. What did the servants do to Haman when they saw the king was angry?
9. What did the king command to be done with Haman?

XLV.

1. What did Esther tell the king now that he did not know before?
2. What did the king do with Haman's ring that he had once given him?
3. To whom did all Haman's things now belong?
4. What great sorrow still pressed on Esther's heart?
5. What difficulty still lay in the way of the Jews being saved?
6. What prayer did Esther make to the king?

7. How could the king save the Jews without changing the law respecting them?
8. Would all the heathen turn against the Jews, when the day fixed for killing them came?

XLVI.

1. What ten men would certainly be killed by the Jews?
2. How many men besides?
3. How many men were killed in the whole kingdom?

XLVII.

1. What were the two feasting days for the Jews at Shushan?
2. What was the feast of deliverance called, and why?
3. Is it still kept by the Jews?
4. What excellent word is never mentioned in the book of Esther?
5. Who wrote this book?
6. Why did the author of this book never mention the name of God in it?
7. How high was Mordecai advanced?
8. What did he speak to the people?

PART SIXTH.

XLVIII.

1. Who was cup-bearer to the king?
2. How long was it since Ezra had gone from Shushan to Jerusalem?
3. What season did Persian kings always spend in Shushan?
4. Where did they spend the summer?
5. How far was it from Babylon?
6. Whom did Nehemiah see who was just come from Jerusalem?
7. What did he ask him?
8. What answer did Hanani give?
9. What prayer did Nehemiah offer?
10. Whom did Nehemiah mean in his prayer by 'this man?'

XLIX.

1. How long was it before Nehemiah asked the king to allow him to go to Jerusalem?
2. What did the king, at last, say to him?

2. How were the people forbidden to look before the king?
3. Why did not Nehemiah speak of God in his answer?
4. What was the king's answer?
5. What did Nehemiah request?
6. What questions did the king ask Nehemiah?
7. What kind letters did the king write to his people about Nehemiah?
8. Whom did the king appoint to guard him?

L.

1. How long would Nehemiah's journey last?
2. What was the first city he came to?
3. Mention any other great city he came to.
4. Why did he not wish his coming to Jerusalem to be known?
5. What two men knew of it?
6. What good person there was glad to see him?
7. Three days after his arrival, what did Nehemiah do one night?
8. Why was Nehemiah obliged to turn back?
9. Whom did he call together next day?

10. What did all these people say when they heard Nehemiah's speech?

LI.

1. How did Sanballat and Tobiah show their spite?
2. Who joined them in mocking?
3. What did Nehemiah declare to them?
4. At what gate did the priests begin to build?
5. Mention the names of the gates you can remember.
6. What part of the wall did each one build?

LII.

1. What jeers did the enemies of the Jews utter?
2. As the wall advanced, what did the enemies think of doing?
3. With what did Nehemiah provide the builders?
4. How did Nehemiah prevent the builders being taken by surprise at their work?
5. Why did Nehemiah provide a trumpet?

6. What were they always to do in the night, when some slept?
7. What did Nehemiah specially rely upon, besides work?

LIII.

1. What complaints did the poor people make to Nehemiah against the rich?
2. What did Nehemiah say to the rich?
3. What did he tell the priests to make the rich people swear?
4. Why did Nehemiah shake his garments?
5. What wrong customs did Nehemiah refuse to follow?
6. What was his motive?
7. What did Nehemiah prepare for the people every day who came from a distance?
8. Did Nehemiah think he deserved to be rewarded for his goodness?
9. What confession did he make which shows that he thought he deserved nothing?

LIV.

1. Who were the three great enemies of the Jews?

2. What sort of plans did they now use to hurt the Jews?
3. Why did they ask Nehemiah to meet them in one of the villages near Jerusalem?
4. What was the sly plan Sanballat used at last?
5. Whose help did the enemies ask afterwards?
6. What did Shemaiah propose to Nehemiah to do?
7. Why would not Nehemiah consent?
8. Where did Nehemiah go for protection?
9. What women joined against him?

LV.

1. How long did it take to finish the wall?
2. In what month was it finished?
3. How long after Nehemiah's arrival?
4. How was Tobiah connected with people in the city?
5. Were not these marriages very wicked?
6. How did Tobiah show his spite against Nehemiah?
7. What two good men did Nehemiah set over Jerusalem?

8 What charge did Nehemiah give to these good men?

9. What did Nehemiah chiefly desire to do for the good of Jerusalem?

LVI.

1. What Jewish feast took place in September?
2. What good priest had been in Jerusalem twelve years?
3. Where did he stand at this feast to read to the people?
4. Who were on each side of him?
5. How did the service begin?
6. What did Ezra do next?
7. Were there any children at the service?
8. How long did it last?
9. What effect had the hearing the word upon the people?
10. Why did they weep?
11. How did they spend the rest of the day?

LVII.

1. What feast was there still remaining for the people to keep?

2. How long had they to prepare for it?
3. What did they go into the woods to get?
4. Where did they pitch the leafy tents?
5. How long did they sit in these tents?
6. After the feast, what was held?
7. Who preached and prayed aloud?
8. What did they do for a fourth part of the day?
9. How long is that?
10. What did they do for another fourth part?

LVIII.

1. What covenant did they enter into?
2. Who wrote down their names?
3. How many principal things did they promise?
4. What were they?
5. Why did they seal this covenant?

LIX.

1. Why was Jerusalem now safe to live in?
2. What was there wanting in it?

3. Why ought people to wish to live there?
4. How was it settled?
5. How was the wall dedicated?
6. When the two companies met what did they do?
7. What enemies must have hated the song of praise?
8. When was the feast observed by our Lord (John, x. 22)?

LX.

1. How soon did Nehemiah according to his promise return to Persia?
2. Who was the high-priest he left in Jerusalem?
3. Whom did Eliashib not resemble?
4. With whom did he make a friendship?
5. What did Tobiah ask Eliashib to let him have?
6. What were these little rooms for?
7. What did Tobiah do with them?
8. When Nehemiah returned what did he do to Tobiah's little rooms?
9. How were they purified?

10. What did he have brought back to the rooms?
11. What had the people left off doing?
12. Why were the Levites working in the fields?
13. Why was Nehemiah angry?
14. What did he desire the people to bring?
15. What did Nehemiah say to God in his prayer?
16. What did Nehemiah not care for?
17. What did he care for?
18. What other promise in the covenant had the Jews broken?
19. What did Nehemiah see people doing on the Sabbath?
20. Whom was Nehemiah angry with?
21. What rule did Nehemiah make about shutting the gates?
22. Whom did he place as door-keepers?
23. What worse sin had the Jews committed?
24. In what language did the children talk?
25. What did Nehemiah do to the men who had married heathen wives?
26. What good prophet of old did the same?
27. What marks of disgrace did they bear?
28. What did some people do in consequence?

29. What relation of the high-priest had disobeyed?
30. Would he give up his heathen wife?
31. Where did he go, and what did he build there?
32. What happened afterwards at the side of a well near that place?
33. What question did a woman ask the Lord Jesus there about the mountain and the Temple there?

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